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Cross-gender Casting of Tragedies by William Shakespeare

Cross-genderové obsazení tragédií Williama Shakespeara

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracoval/a samostatně, že jsem řádně citoval/a všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.
V Praze dne 15. 8. 2016

Barbora Mašková

(I declare that the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.)
Prague, 15. 8. 2016

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Abstrakt:

Cross-genderové obsazení her Williama Shakespeare (tedy obsazení ženského interpreta do mužské role a naopak) není řídkým fenoménem a v posledních letech jeho popularita stoupá. I přes časté tvrzení divadelníků a kritiků že se jedná o obsazení, které nezohledňuje tender (gender-blind casting) se tato práce snaží dokázat, že tomu tak není. Jako příklady jsou použity tři nejčastěji inscenované, tedy a často cross-genderově obsazené hry *Hamlet*, *Král Lear* a *Romeo a Julie*. Na půdorysu těchto her se práce snaží ukázat variabilitu přístupů ke cross-genderovému obsazení v jeho rozličných podobách.

V první kapitole je definována klíčová terminologie, aby bylo zabráněno záměně pojmů. Jedná se o pojmy cross-dressing, travesty a cross-genderové obsazení. Následuje několik podkapitol zabývajících se myšlenkovým rámcem, který staví zejména na Judith Butler a její dekonstrukci genderu a konceptu performativity genderu. Poslední podkapitola této sekce se pak zabývá historií cross-genderového obsazení, které zahrnuje i pouze mužské Alžbětinské herecké soubory.

Následující kapitoly jsou věnovány jednotlivým hrám, analýze možných interpretačních klíčů a motivací pro cross-genderové zpracování a cross-genderové inscenační tradic jak na anglofonních, tak na českých jevištích. To je doplněno o jednu hlubší analýzu vybraného představení: u *Hamleta* je to inscenace Manchesterského Royal Exchange Theatre s Maxine Peake v titulní roli, u *Krále Leara* je to výkon Kateřiny Winterové jako Blázna a Kordélie v národním divadle v Praze a v případě *Romea a Julie* je analyzována inscenace z Čunoherního studia Ústí nad Labem, v níž hráli jen muži.

Rozdíly těchto přístupů jsou pak shrnuty v závěru. Následuje zvážení tendence označovat tento typ obsazení jako gender-blind, s možným vysvětlením, kterým je snaha vyhnout se škatulce feministických, či LGBT inscenací. Tato práce se ovšem snaží dokázat, že tento typ angažovanosti vůbec není podmínkou pro cross-genderové obsazení. Hlavím cílem práce he tedy dokázat, že na cross-genderovém obsazení nejen sejde, ale může inscenaci zásadně obohatit a přinést čerstvé a inovativní čtení, které se nemusí vztahovat pouze k genderu.

Klíčová slova: cross-genderové obsazení, pouze mužské obsazení, pouze ženské obsazení, travesty, cross-dressing, Shakespeare, renesanční drama, *Hamlet*, *Král Lear*, *Romeo a Julie*

Abstract:

Cross-gender casting (i.e. the casting of female performers for male parts and vice versa) of plays by William Shakespeare is not a scarce phenomenon and is getting more and more popular in the recent years. In spite of the frequent claim of the theatre-makers and critics that it is in fact a gender blind casting, where the gender of the performer does not matter, the thesis attempts to prove that, in fact, it is not the case. This is exemplified on three most frequently staged and also most commonly cross-gender cast plays: Hamlet, King Lear and Romeo and Juliet. Via these examples the thesis shows the variability of approaches to cross-gender casting and the differences in realization.

In the first chapter, the key terminology is defined, in order to avoid confusion, discussing the differences between cross-dressing, travesty and cross-gender casting. That is followed by subchapters in which the basic frame of thought is suggested, building on Judith Butler's deconstruction of gender and the concept of gender performativity. The last subchapter of this section deals with the history of cross-gender casting, including the Elizabethan all-male staging tradition.

The next three chapters are then devoted to each of the plays, analyzing the possible interpretive keys and motivations for a cross-gender cast performance, the cross-gendered staging tradition on both Anglophone and Czech stages, concluding with a more detailed analysis of a particularly interesting performance: in case of *Hamlet* it is Royal Exchange Theatre's production from Manchester with Maxine Peake as Hamlet, for *King Lear* it is Kateřina Winterová's performance as the Fool and Cordelia in The National Theatre in Prague and for *Romeo and Juliet* an all-male performance from Činoherní studio Ústí nad Labem was chosen.

The differences of the approaches are then summarized in the conclusion. That is followed by a brief questioning of the reasons behind the tendency to discuss these castings as gender-blind, suggesting a possible answer to that in trying to avoid labelling of a feminist, or LGBT production. The analyses above nevertheless attempt to prove that that is not necessarily the case with every cross-gendered production. The main goal of the thesis is thus to show cross-gender casting not only matters, but can

bring much more fresh and innovative interpretations than may be initially presupposed and in more spheres then just gender.

Key Words: cross-gender casting, same-sex casting, travesty, cross-dressing, Shakespeare, Renaissance drama, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*

Permission

Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the MA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Casting across Gender

An English proverb claims that the tailor makes the man. And indeed for a job interview one wears their best clothes not only to impress the potential boss, but also to feel more confident. In other words, clothes can become a costume that helps the person wearing it act in one way or another. Shakespeare employed this strategy in many of his plays, when the female heroine dressed up to look like a man, by which means she gained a new and stronger voice in the world controlled by men. This is coherent with Judith Butler's notion of the performative nature of sex and gender, which will be discussed further on in the thesis. But what happens when the director wants to go beyond simple cross-dressing and finds reasons for a male character to be played by a woman and vice versa?

The fact that cross-gender casting adds a very different and refreshing quality to the performance is indisputable. Coming back to Butler, one might argue that this discrepancy between the actual physical sex of the performer and the gender of the character creates an acting figure[1] which may fall into the category of abject bodies. Abjection literally means "the state of being cast off and losing oneself"[2]. Julia Kristeva operates with the term abject body as a body that is not tolerable, a body that "leaks wastes and fluids, violates its own borders and does not conform to social standards of cleanliness or propriety"[3]. Judith Butler gives the term a social dimension and claims that abject bodies are thus those, that the majority of the discourse-creating society considers alien: "'abject' because these characters are unable to function as society expects them to and have difficulty inhabiting their bodies, 'unthinkable' because they are denied the intelligibility of an identifiable disease which would make their predicaments more readily understandable"[4] – a clearly identifiable weirdo, a misfit. And many cross-gender performed characters do fall into that category.

[1] "herecká postava" according to the terminology established by Otakar Zich
[2] Seung-hoon Jeong: *Cinematic Interfaces: Film Theory After New Media* (London: Routledge, 2013) 205.
[3] Phil Hubbard: *Cities and Sexualities* (London: Routledge, 2013) 96.
[4] Maya Lang: *The Hypochondriac: Bodies in Protest from Herman Melville to Toni Morrison* (Ann Arbor: ProQuest 2007) 3.

This is nevertheless not the case of all cross-gender cast performances. The statement is true only as long as there is only one character (or, if the interpretation requires it, a limited number of characters) that is performed by an actor of the opposite sex. The case is slightly different when it comes to performances with only male, or only female cast, when the feeling of alienation is reduced by the fact that the performance has created a different normativity for its own purposes. A residual feeling of irregularity remains, but the audience is generally willing to play with the performers and accept the rules of their world. This effect is easiest to achieve when the piece is presented as an all-male performance faithful to the Shakespearean model, including appropriate set design and costumes. Then nobody is worried about the butchering of the works of the great bard with anachronistic gender-related innovations.

Female cross-gender cast productions are generally perceived less favourably. In her book *Cross-Gender Shakespeare and English National Identity* Elizabeth Klett mentions the fact, that "many theater reviewers have attacked the practice, arguing that it adulterates Shakespeare and, by implication, the English cultural heritage that is strengthened by his plays."[5] These voices will always be more prominent when it comes to Shakespeare then with any other playwright because of his canonical value. But one must always keep in mind, that the most important feature of theatre, which distinguishes it from other artistic disciplines, is its ever-changing nature. One reading, one interpretation, one production does not need to bother anyone, as it will never be more than one of the many possible readings. Nobody is trying to persuade anybody that Hamlet was physically a woman. But as long as it enables the audience to have a new insight into a play they have seen many times before, the production needs to be credited for that.

The following thesis will examine different examples of cross-gender casting in three plays by William Shakespeare, attempting to show the variability of such casting, based on both analytical readings of the plays and cross-gendered staging history. This selection was based on the differences in the effect these instances of cross-gender casting has on the audience and overall innovativeness, as well as visibility on both

[5] Elizabeth Klett: *Cross-Gender Shakespeare and English National Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2009) 2.

Czech and Anglophone stages. The titles of the three chosen plays are not surprising. *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet* belong to the most popular and thus most frequently staged pieces by William Shakespeare, therefore there is a statistic probability that some of these productions will tend to experiment with gender-related questions. After an analysis of the texts, the thesis will concentrate on cross-gendered staging history of the plays, which may seem rather descriptive, as it is largely based on reviews and interviews with the creators, yet is important in order to be able to evaluate the variety of possible approaches, as well as risks and dangers of cross-gender casting. The staging history also proves that there is already a certain staging tradition of cross-gender cast performances and they are therefore not to be seen as novelty. Each of the three chapters devoted to the plays will include a deeper analysis of a recent critically acclaimed cross-gendered production from either Anglophone or Czech stage, which was chosen based on quality of the production as well as accessibility of related materials.

1.2. Key Terminology and Theoretical Background

In spite of the fact that the thesis is mostly concerned with interpretative keys that reflect the needs of a practical theatre (i.e. dramaturgy, directing and acting), it is nevertheless necessary to establish a theoretical background that is relevant to the readings of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as, even though they may collide with the reality of stage representation, these notions form the contemporary gender discourse and frame of thought. These also need to be supported by terminology relevant to female performers portraying males on stage and vice versa.

1.2.1. Cross-dressing, Cross-gender Acting / Casting and Travesty

To establish the basic terminology, the three terms above need to be defined. The first one, cross-dressing, refers to a practice when a member of a particular gender uses clothes (as suggested by the term itself) and overall stylization, including hair and makeup, attributed to the opposite gender, creating what can be described as a mask of a gender. In real life, cross-dressing, or transvestism, in which the person not only dresses but also acts as a member of the opposite sex, has a variety of reasons, from fetishism, sexual arousal, confusion, or dissatisfaction with an attributed sexual identity. On stage,

cross-dressing is most commonly a means of deception or, disguise. In Shakespeare's work, it is usually the case of a female character wearing a male garment: Portia facing the court as the lawyer Balthazar in *The Merchant of Venice*, Rosalind becoming Ganymede in *As You Like It*, or Viola assuming the role of Cesario in *Twelfth Night*.

But occasionally even male characters cross-dress. A great example of this occurs in *The Taming of the Shrew*, not in the central part of the play, but in the framing story that introduces the main narrative. When the pauper Sly wakes up in the Lord's house and is tricked into believing that he belongs there and his life was just a fifteen years long dream, he is introduced to a page who, cross-dressed as a woman, pretends to be Sly's wife. The usage of cross-dressing here shows the delicacy with which Shakespeare employed play with gender. Even though a man dressed as a woman is a traditional source of belly laughs based merely on the visual, the comedy of this scene is based on the confusion of Sly, not the clothing of the page, which only supports the hang-over pauper's puzzlement. This can all be linked back to the Shakespearean staging tradition, where the audience were accustomed to seeing males portray female characters, as "the mere sight of a male character in women's clothes is unlikely to have provoked the kind of automatic, uneasy laughter that made films like *Tootsie* and *Some Like It Hot* so hilariously funny to twentieth-century audiences"[6].

The second example of male to female cross-dressing in Shakespeare brings the Shakespearean and contemporary audience much closer together. Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* changes his clothes to look like the fat aunt of one of Mistress Ford's maids. Falstaff is one of the most complex characters Shakespeare ever created, but the fact that he performs this unsuccessful, obvious disguise as a woman, which can be branded "cod drag", referring to a mocking, burlesque kind of cross-dressing, as "cod means both scrotum or testicles, and hoax, fool, pretence or mock"[7], led some critics to interpret this occurrence of Falstaff as degradation of the character. Others looked for complexity even in this possibly low-brow image, like W. H. Auden, who sees the sexually ambiguous cross-dressed Falstaff, whose body image resembles one of a

[6]Phyllis Rackin: "Shakespeare's Crossdressing Comedies," ed. Richard Dutton, Jean E. Howard*: A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume III: The Comedies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) 132.
[7] Marjorie Graber: "Fetish Envy," ed. Nancy Burke: *Gender and Envy* (New York: Routledge, 1998) 304.

pregnant lady as "a cross between a very young child and a pregnant mother."[8] That is an image that in a way corresponds with the pre-oedipal maternal figure Falstaff represents for prince Hal in the history plays.

The second term, most important for the thesis, is cross-gender acting. Unlike cross-dressing, cross-gender acting reflects portrayal of a character by a performer of an opposite gender. Such a performance, as Lesley Ferris puts it, forces the audience "to concede to multiple meanings, to ambiguities of thought, feeling, categorization, to refuse closure."[9] Cross-gender acting has been interpreted as an umbrella term, which includes cross-dressed performances. Because of this the term used for the purposes of the thesis is thus cross-gender casting, as it reflects the intention of the creative team, to portray a character by a member of the opposite gender throughout the play and thus, hopefully, with a specific interpretive key. In other words, cross-gender casting does not play with the gender identity of the character as much as that of the performer. This was nevertheless not the case throughout the staging history of Shakespeare, as will be demonstrated in the section concerned with the history of cross-gender casting.

The last term that needs to be reflected upon is "travesty" (sometimes spelled "travesti", especially in the realm of the opera). The word is morphologically derived from the "French past participle *travesti*, descended from Italian *trans* ('across, to the opposite') and *vesti*, the past participle of *vesitre* ('to dress')"[10]. The travesty parts were most commonly used for comic effect, even though it is not necessarily a part of the definition of the term. In operas in particular travesty parts, often referred to as trouser roles or breech parts, also carried an "extremely thinly veiled lesbian romance"[11] as in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, or Richard Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*. Travesty performances thus were to deliver some entertainment value, be it comedy – most common for male to female travesty, or hits at attraction between the members of the same sex – especially in case of female to male travesty. Nevertheless, the term itself can be seen as problematic, as "critics have struggled to differentiate the terms travesty,

[8] Wystan Hugh Auden: *Lectures on Shakespeare* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) 111.
[9] Lesley Ferris: *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing* (London: Routledge, 2005) 8.
[10] Martha Bayless: "Travesty," ed. Salvatore Attardo: *Encyclopedia of Humor Studies* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publication, 2014) 775.
[11] Daniel Hendrickson: "Opera," ed. David A. Gerstner: *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Queer Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006) 441.

parody, caricature, pastiche and burlesque, with no critical consensus as to exactly where the demarcations lie."[12] The word travesty is also commonly used in contemporary English, referring to a "ludicrously or deliberately insufficient imitation"[13], a meaning that is by no means restricted to the world of theatre. The connotation is thus distinctly low-brow. When observing the term in context of those that often merge with it (such as caricature, burlesque etc.) it is obvious that a travesty usually carries an element of excess, or exaggeration, mainly when it comes to stereotypical gender characteristics, which belong to the opposite gender than the one of the performer, which is not a prerequisite of a cross-gendered performance. Because in the twentieth and twenty-first century cross-gendered performances of tragedies by William Shakespeare this comedic effect is usually not desired, the thesis employs the much broader term cross-gender casting.

1.2.2. Jacques Derrida and "Différance"

The basis for a great deal of contemporary thought regarding gender is Jacques Derrida's application of the term "différence". His theory stems from Ferdinand de Saussure's language theories, in which he claimed that language is arbitrary, because in different languages different words or, more generally, signifiers are attributed to the same objects, or signifieds. Derrida then develops this idea and claims that to understand any sign the preceptor needs to be able to place it in a particular system. Meaning both to differ and to deffer, "différence" itself is a great example of the phenomenon. In French the word sounds exactly the same as difference, so, when spoken, a part of its meaning gets lost and needs to be further explained in an extensive commentary. But when written, which is presumably the more restricted way of communicating, the way to understanding the word in its full extent is much more straight-forward. By that means "différance" "has inscribed within in it in a non-vocalisable graphic mark, an extensive production which proscribes the possibility of assigning a single meaning or identity."[14]

[12] Bayless 775.
[13] Simon Dentith: *Parody* (London: Routledge, 2002) 195.
[14] Jacques Derrida: *The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) 11.

If language system or a particular discourse is then so important, one has to try to eliminate the notion of binary oppositions, because they determine each other on an arbitrary basis and thus limits full understanding of the terms. As Derrida claims in *Margins of Philosophy*:

> Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring. This citationality, duplication, or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is not an accident or anomaly, but is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could no longer even have a so-called "normal" functioning. What would a mark be that one could not cite? And whose origin could not be lost on the way?[15]

The process, which he called deconstruction, is the process of getting rid of these oppositions and by that means allowing a great re-evaluation of western thinking and dialectics. His theory became the foundation of many innovations within various fields of thought. Those most important for theatre are, among others, gender and sex.

1.2.3. Gender Performance and Gender Performativity

The notion of gender as something that is performative comes from Judith Butler. She differentiates between gender that is performed, meaning that "we've taken on a role, we're acting in some way and that our acting, or our role playing is crucial to the gender that we are"[16], and gender that is performative, which relates to the fact that it "produces a series of effects"[17]. These effects are then interpreted as coherent with being a male or a female, which is closely linked to the normative nature of gender, as it

[15] Jacques Derrida: *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) 320 - 321.
[16] Big Think: "Judith Butler: Your Behavior Creates Your Gender," Online video clip, Youtube, *Youtube*, Jun 6, 2011 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bo7o2LYATDc> 9 Feb 2016.
[17] ibid.

is "always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms"[18]. By that means Butler effectively applies Derrida's concept of deconstruction to gender, which is not something that is biologically given, or stable, but a product of a particular discourse – a "phenomenon that is being produced and reproduced all the time"[19].

The theory becomes more problematic, when the actual physical body comes into consideration. Butler argues against the traditional dichotomy between gender and sex that stems from Claude Lévi-Strauss' interpretation of the distinction between nature and culture, where one is biological and the other socio-cultural. She claims that both sex and gender are socially constructed categories, as they both serve normative purposes. Sex is thus not a "simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms."[20] She thus, rather controversially, claims that there is no "natural" sex, which leads to the assumption, that "it is not sex that dictates or shapes our performance of gender, but rather the repeated performance of gendered behaviour that accretes, over time, to produce the idea of an underlying sex."[21]

However debatable Butler's ideas may be, they are very useful when it comes to cross-gender casting. In this type of casting theatrical representations, which, at least on the stages of dramatic theatre, usually attempt to correspond with reality as closely as possible, reflecting the ancient principle of mimesis, suddenly seem to drift away from their real life models. The performers are suddenly altering, or playing with, the most basic categories the audience can perceive, such as sex and gender, categories which are commonly perceived as static and, as was explained earlier, in case of sex even unalterably biologically given. But mimesis is by no means simple reproduction; it entails both copying and improving at the same time, adding the artist's creative input. A creative approach to the categories of sex and gender on stage can be the most challenging, but also the most rewarding work for an actor, or an actress, as it includes a complete reinvention of themselves and allows them to break the normativity of sex and

[18] Sharon O'Dair: "Philosophy in a Gorilla Suit," ed. Peter Holland: *Shakespeare Survey: Volume 60, Theatres for Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 148.
[19] ibid.
[20] Judith Butler: *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 2.
[21] Julia MacKenzie: "Gender," ed. Mark Bevir: *Encyclopedia of Political Theory: A – E* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2010) 548.

gender, which is so deeply rooted within the society. Denying the possibility to fulfil the opposite gender role on stage, means, as Elizabeth Klett puts it, denying the "agency to the performer, who becomes simply a body doomed to continually reinforce recognizable patterns of social behaviour."[22]

1.2.4. Psychoanalysis and "Masquerade"

In the 1920s psychoanalysis was booming and the works of Sigmund Freud were translated into various languages. One of these pioneer translators was also Joan Riviere, a well established psychoanalyst herself. In 1929 she wrote an essay called "Womanliness as Masquerade", in which she expressed her fascination with the recent developments in high achieving women's perception of their femininity. Unlike during what was to her very recent past, when females who wanted to succeed had to employ a certain degree of maleness: "[they] made no secret of [their] wish or claim to be a man"[23], recently women in high positions strive to fulfil the traditionally female roles as well. Riviere acknowledges that women who work in highly intellectually demanding positions at universities etc. often "are excellent wives and mothers, capable housewives; they maintain social life and assist culture; they have no lack of feminine interests"[24], which she is, from a psychological standpoint, baffled by. She then describes a case of this type of a woman who, during psychoanalytic sessions, confessed to occasional flirtation and need of acceptance by her male peers, who could be identified as father figures. The same woman then described her "dreams of people putting masks on their faces in order to avert disaster"[25], which inspired Riviere to the following statement:

> Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it - much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the

[22] Klett 6.
[23] Joan Riviere: *The Inner World and Joan Riviere: Collected Papers 1929 - 1958* (London: Karnac Books, 1991) 91.
[24] ibid.
[25] Riviere 94.

> "masquerade". My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial. They are the same thing. The capacity for womanliness was there in this woman - and one might even say it exists in the most completely homosexual woman - but owing to her conflicts it did not represent her main development and was used far more as a device for avoiding anxiety than as a primary mode of sexual enjoyment.[26]

Jacques Lacan later disputed Riviere's conclusion, as he did not agree that this type of masquerade would occur only when it comes to women and femininity, but is much rather a compensation for the lack of the other: "nothing represents in it the Other, the radical Other, the Other as such. This representation of the Other is lacking, specifically, between the two opposed worlds that sexuality designates for us in the masculine and the feminine."[27] One's mind therefore works with certain ideals of masculinity and femininity, which are to be fulfilled, or approximated and this process functions as gender mimicry.

Judith Butler then worked with the idea coherently with her notion of gender performativity. Being determined via actions that are ascribed to the masculine or the feminine then creates gender roles and gendered bodies, which are essentially "legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic"[28]. Unlike Luce Irigaray, who argued that feminine masquerade is a false femininity, presuming some sort of a natural, or authentic femininity, Butler's masquerade is a performative gender-creating action. Another term often employed in this context is mimicry (a term originating in the colonial studies, in the work of Homi Bhaba), which Fenella Cannell explains as "imitation of content [that] can constitute a self-transformative process."[29] This is key

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[26] ibid.
[27] Jacques Lacan: *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998) 193.
[28] Maria Morelli: "Kaleidoscopic Sexualities: Defying Normative Resistance and Maternal Melancholia an *Aracoeli*," ed. Stefania Lucamante: *Elsa Morante's Politics of Writing: Rethinking Subjectivity, History, and the Power of Art* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) 222.
[29] Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns: *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2013)12.

for understanding of gender as something that is alterable by specific performative actions.

All the above is important for her conclusions about drag, which are of great importance for the thesis. In *Bodies that Matter* Butler states that "drag is subversive to an extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality."[30] Even though Butler later appropriated the statement, saying that "there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion"[31], employing examples such as *Some Like It Hot*, or *Victor / Victoria*, she maintains that "[a]t best it seems drag is a site of a certain ambivalence"[32]. Cross-gendered performances have the same effect as they undermine what one sees as natural and point out the constructedness of gender. That makes them, to some, even today a rather unpalatable and disturbing sight, as it opposes the fixity of gender and supports re-evaluation of what is perceived as given.

1.3. History of Cross-Gender Casting

There are many instances of cross-gender casting in the history of theatre. In the early days of dramatic arts, in the antiquity, the cast was famously male-only. On Shakesperean stages the same rules applied. The female parts were most commonly cast by young actors, so called "boy players", who, as female characters, had to be courted by other male actors. Moreover, because of the frequency of cross-dressing in the contemporary drama, these male boy players, who were cross-gender cast as women, had to then cross-dress and play a woman pretending to be a man, adding an extra dimension to the already intricate layering of gender performance. Because of this Jean Howard brands the Elizabethan stage a space that was "was neither simply a 'heterosexual' nor a 'homoerotic' institution, but a site where there was considerable fluidity and multiplicity in the channelling of sexual energies."[33] But such a spectacle was unpalatable for the Puritans, who had many issues with theatre in general. Nevertheless, even the opinions of present day theatrologists and historians are divided

[30] Butler: *Bodies that Matter* 125.
[31] ibid.
[32] ibid.
[33] Jean E. Howard: "The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England," ed. Stephen Orgel & Sean Keilen: *Shakespeare and History* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 379.

regarding the perception of such utilization of cross-gender acting by the contemporary audience.

Some argue that the performances may have had a certain homoerotic quality to them, which the audience did notice. For instance, Lisa Jardine goes as far as claiming that "these [female] figures are sexually enticing qua transvestied boys, and that the plays encourage the audience to view them as such"[34]. That would support the overall misogyny of the period, which possibly includes a tendency towards homoeroticism. And it can also be linked to the Puritan fear of theatres as "Puritan moralists [...] inveighed against the sins of theatrical representation and warned that the display of adult male actors embracing cross-dressed boys on stage could provoke men in the audience to sodomitical acts."[35]

This opinion is nevertheless not generally accepted by far, as some critics state that because of the long staging tradition that casts young male actors into female parts, which stretches from the ancient Greek theatre, this convention was so well established that the spectators would not regard it in the same way that a modern audience would, as

> Elizabethan spectators [...] didn't 'take' boy actors as eroticized bodies at all, but understood that during the two hours' traffic on the stage, they were to read as female the character as played: the boy actor 'himself' became invisible, immersed in the role he assumed, his sex occluded by spectators' tacit complicity in the fiction.[36]

This can be supported also by the contemporary reviews. For instance, in a review of a 1610 performance of *Othello*, the writer refers to the character of Desdemona as "she" and does not seem to reflect at all that the performer was a boy, which speaks in favour of the efficiency of the gender performance of the boy players.[37]

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[34] Dympna Callaghan: *Shakespeare Without Women* (London: Routledge, 2002) 31.
[35] ibid.
[36] Bulman 566.
[37] Elizabeth Howe: *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 20.

Another point against the claim for the homoerotic reading of the love scenes in these Renaissance productions is simply economical, as theatre was not a predominantly male entertainment, but was vastly popular among women as well. One may then presume that the all-male cast was to be perceived more intact with the ancient staging tradition, rather than omitting the necessary evil that are women from the ideal world on stage. However, "the exclusion of women from the stage and their simultaneous inclusion as customers – the fundamental characteristic (contradiction) of the institution of theatre in early modern England – does not exculpate theatre from charges of misogyny."[38]

Whichever way it was, it all began to change in the revolutionary period of the Restoration. In the very same year when Charles II reassumed his inherited position as the leader of the nation, a first woman took the stage of an English theatre. The performance took place on the 8th December 1660, the part was Desdemona in *Othello*, but the woman in question remains unnamed, even though it was most likely to have been Anne Marshall or Margaret Hughes, who were both members of Thomas Killigrew's King's Company.[39] Even though male only productions continued to exist at least to an extent, the boom of female actresses was overwhelming and surprising, as countries such as France and Italy have been using female actresses for approximately a hundred years already and English stages did not seem to rush into disrupting the male-only convention.[40] This can be attributed to a sexual revolution of sorts that England was going through at the time, which altered the perception of women and their sexuality, as can be demonstrated by the typically Restoration genre of comedy of manners. This change stemmed from the "upper and upper-middle classes in the late seventeenth century"[41], which ceased to condemn and, moreover, started to celebrate "the infinite variety of the seductress"[42].

It is not surprising that with this rapid change in the perception of gender and sexuality cross-dressing and cross-gender casting of women was high in demand.

[38] Callaghan 31.
[39] Theresa D. Kemp: *Women in the Age of Shakespeare* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2010) 119.
[40] Howe 20.
[41] Howe 21.
[42] ibid.

Numbers-wise "nearly a quarter of the plays produced on the Restoration stage, both adaptations and original dramas, features one or more cross-dressed parts for women [...] and actresses performed travesty roles [...] in a further fourteen plays."[43] Nevertheless, since the Restoration the trend oscillated significantly during the following centuries. As Michelene Wandor points out: "transvestite theatre has flourished at times of changing attitudes to women in theatre and to sexuality in society – the Restoration, the Industrial Revolution, the suffragette agitation and now, in the second half of the twentieth century."[44] To an extent this also corresponds with the type of roles that were cross-gender cast: "in the eighteenth century, actresses played pages and young princes; and in the nineteenth century, women played weightier, melodramatic, boy protagonists."[45] Wandor then goes on to explain that:

> At such times clearly there is a tension between the surface appearance of how men and women are supposed to 'be' and the changing reality. The function of transvestite theatre thus becomes twofold; on the one hand, it is an effort to contain rebellion by ridiculing any departure from the 'norm', and on the other, it becomes an expression of rebellion against the status quo.[46]

The more independent women were, the more intricate their male alter-egos became. The twentieth century is the best indicator of this trend, as will be proved in the respective sections analyzing the twentieth and twenty-first century productions of the chosen plays.

A relatively new and usually feminist approach to the historical all-male cast is an all-female production. One of the pioneering projects in that area took place on the verge of the new century in 1887 in Wellesley College, a college for women, where Wellesley College Shakespeare Society prided on their all-female cast.[47] At this point

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[43] Fiona Ritchie: *Women and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) 11.
[44]Michelene Wandor: *Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London: Methuen Publishing Ltd, 1981) 19.
[45] Laura Horak: *Girls Will Be Boys: Cross-Dressed Women, Lesbians, and American Cinema, 1908-1934* (New Brinswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016) 27.
[46] Wandor 19.
[47] Yu Jin Ko: "Women who will make a difference: Shakespeare at Wellesley College," ed. Andrew James Hartley: *Shakespeare on the University Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge university Press, 2014) 60.

explicitly feminist agenda was not a priority. The society's aim, according to one of the members, was to "be faithful to a vision of an authentic Shakespeare, a Shakespeare that, in production, is gender-neutral and not decisively defined by sensibilities that might be specific to a single-sex setting."[48] Even though the society did not approach the texts from a feminist perspective per se, the society soon developed a rather strong position within the campus and managed to adopt "a practice that publicly challenged Victorian ideas about gender, despite Wellesley's reputation of middle-class respectability"[49]. Nevertheless, the young women unashamedly wearing tights, was seen as far too provocative and led the administration to censoring the pieces.[50] In spite of that, the success of Wellesley College Shakespeare Society was paving the way for future productions.

In pre-war England another, albeit now nearly forgotten, all-female Shakespeare group called Osiris Players was born. It existed until the mid-50s and was of key importance throughout the period of World War II, when the company toured "villages and small towns, quite often playing in non-standard and even non-theatre venues to war-torn communities throughout the west midlands of England."[51] Although information about the group is quite scarce and depend heavily on the memories and personal archives of former members, the very existence of the company inspired Imogen Stubbs to write the play *We Happy Few*, about seven women playing Shakespeare during war-time. The play premiered in 2004 in the Gielgud Theatre and was directed by Trevor Nunn.[52]

In spite of various attempts to approach Shakespeare with an all-female cast in the previous years, it was not until the 1990s and onwards when such experiments with the plays became more frequent. A significant company that stages all-female

[48] Hartley 60.
[49]Carrington OBrion: "'Faith, Let Me Not Play a Woman': The Wellesley College Shakespeare Society, 1877-1906", *Wellesley.edu*, <https://www.wellesley.edu/sites/default/files/assets/departments/americanstudies/files/obrion_hershey_.pdf> 6 March 2016.
[50] ibid.
[51] Peter Billingham: "Rosalinds, Violas, and Other Sentimantal Friendships: The Osiris Players and Shakespeare, 1939 – 1945," ed. Irene Rima Makaryk: *Shakespeare and the Second World War: Memory, Culture, Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012) 218.
[52] Michael Billington: "We Happy Few", *The Guardian.co.uk*, Guardian News and Media Ltd, 5 July 2004 < http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2004/jul/05/theatre > 12 Feb 2016.

Shakespeare was founded for that purpose in 1993 in Los Angeles (being the first one to do so in the US) by actress and director Lisa Wolpe, and is functioning under the name of Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company still today.[53] Their portfolio includes all of the major plays by William Shakespeare, such as: "*Romeo and Juliet* (1993); *Othello* (1994); *Hamlet* (1995); *Richard III* (1995); *Much Ado About Nothing* (1996); *Measure for Measure* (1997); *Twelfth Night* (2000), *The Tempest* (2002); *The Merchant of Venice* (2005); *As You Like It* (2007)"[54]. The company takes the all-female aspect of their work seriously back stage as well, having a female crew, management or even box office staff. The acting process commonly begins with "gender workshops and consciousness-raising sessions that help to empower the women and allows them to inhabit authoritative roles and move away from roles of victim and voicelessness."[55] One may only wonder what that entails, but regardless of the admirable strife for gender equality, it is questionable whether this rather binary approach to gender can produce a deep portrayal of such a problematic category.

Since then many companies have attempted to effectively interpret Shakespeare's plays for an all-female cast, some of which will be mentioned further on, albeit within the scope of the thesis the multitude of them allows to discuss only a few examples, rather than explore the phenomenon in depth. The significant rise in all-female productions as well as overall interest in cross-gender casting coincides with the 1990s emergence of queer theory, which "has taken the post-structuralist opportunity of undoing the biological fixity of sex so as to expose the artificiality of a sexuality, which is always already mediated by language, discourses and the order of the symbolic."[56] Backed by this analytical approach, artists became more apt to disregard the limiting binary understanding of gender and created characters whose gender performance was much more nuanced. This also coincides with the period when strife for gender equality became well-rooted within the society and the primary issues of first and second-wave feminism were dealt with at least to an extent. This opened new areas of interest for

[53] Terri Power: *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) 89.
[54] "About Us", *Lawsc.net*, Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company, 26 Feb 2016 <http://www.lawsc.net/about_us.php > 5 March 2016.
[55] Power 91.
[56]Luciana Parisi: "The Adventures of a Sex," eds. Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr: *Deleuze and Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) 76.

third-wave feminism, which, being commonly linked with queer theory, is concerned with stereotypes that come with gender roles, and the connections between language and gender. The effects of these “innovations” when it comes to approaching gender will be displayed in the sections dedicated to the specific performances, where the development in this field is clearly visible.

2. HAMLET

2.1. Analysis of the Text

The example of cross-gender casting of the figure of prince Hamlet is notorious and arguably most accessible to viewers. In his most famous monologue the prince discusses the problem of conscience, which seems to be the key to interpreting the whole problem of the character. In his book *Shakespeare a jeviště svět* professor Martin Hilský stresses the fact that the word conscience appears eight times in *Hamlet*, which is more than in any other tragedy written by Shakespeare.[57] This conscience, Hilský continues, is not to be appointed to one's own subjective perception of good and evil, but comes from a higher authority.[58] And that leads to Hamlet's renowned indecisiveness, as he does not know whether to behave according to the law and respect the new king, or listen to the Ghost, which may or may not be of his father and avenge the death of the former king. Looking at some of Shakespeare's other prominent leading men, such as Richard III, Shylock or Othello, none of them seem to be too worried about the possible implications of their arguably immoral decisions. Because he is unable to act, Hamlet creates a new kind of fatal flaw that seems to be out of the ordinary, at least in the butch, manly world, but seem to belong more to what is considered to be traditionally female domain.

Examples of such distinction are to be seen ever since antiquity, like in Sophocles' *Antigone*, or *Electra*. In each of these plays there is the strong female heroine, who tries to transgress this notion of masculine and feminine and gain a more prominent voice in order to achieve her goal. Trying to hold her back, reminding her of her role in the society, but still understanding the heroine's goal and as a result remaining on the fence the whole time is commonly the heroine's distinctly more feminine sister – to Antigone it is Ismene, to Electra Chrysothemis. Shakespeare, with his extraordinary will to create complex characters, puts a voice similar to the one of the young, softer sister into Hamlet's mind, maintaining other masculine qualities of the

[57] Martin Hilský: *Shakespeare a jeviště svět* (Praha: Academia, 2010) 470.
[58] ibid.

character, creating a striking example of internal duality. His doubtful nature associates him with the feminine and thus renders him a position of an effeminate young prince.

But it is not only effeminacy that can make Hamlet a character well-suited for a female performer. It is also his seeming immaturity, at times almost child-like quality, which on the one hand makes it tough for him to make big decisions, such as whether to trust the Ghost or not, but on the other hand makes him occasionally act and speak impulsively. He does not seem to have fought for the crown with Claudius very hard, as if he was not fit to be a king. And, curiously, he does not even posses the lands and financial resources of his late father. Inheritance-wise, something must have gone wrong. As Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz wittily remarks: "Your father was king. You were his only son. Your father dies. You are of age. Your uncle becomes king. [...] Unusual."[59] But how did that come to be? And why does Hamlet seem to reluctantly accept it? It points to the fact that it was somehow legal and legitimate. And indeed it was.

The answer can be found in Thomas Regnier's essay "The Law in Hamlet: Death, Property and Pursuit of Justice". One may presume that Hamlet should have inherited both the crown and his father's property, but effectively he received neither. The answer to the question of why he did not become the king is actually very straight forward: because in Shakespeare's times, unlike in the English system, the king of Denmark was elected.[60] Hamlet himself hints at this procedure as he tells Horatio, that Claudius "hath killed my king, and whored my mother, / Popped in between th'election and my hopes, / Thrown out his angle for my proper life" (V, ii, 64 – 66). Doing this, Phillip Edwards claims, Shakespeare "plays off this elective monarchy against his Elizabethan audience's deep emotional commitment to primogeniture and the right of a son to inherit. The Danish system condemns itself; a country which chooses its kings ends up with the rabble-cry of 'Choose we! Laertes shall be king!'"[61]

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[59] Tom Stoppard: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010) 41.
[60] Thomas Regnier: "The Law in Hamlet: Death, Property and Pursuit of Justice," *Brief Chronicles Vol. III* [Baltimore] – 2011: 117.
[61] Philip Edwards: "Introduction," William Shakespeare: *Hamlet, The Prince of Denmark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 42.

The fact that Hamlet did not have a God-given right to become a king, nevertheless, should not affect the dealings concerned with inheritance. But even here, Claudius managed to "pop in" thanks to his very early marriage to Gertrude. In the contemporary legal system this gave Claudius a certain claim to Gertrude's possessions, because of the unifying power of marriage. And because the marriage was hasty, as Hamlet himself mentions, Claudius managed to get as much out of it financially as he possibly could, leaving Hamlet penniless:

> After the husband's death, the widow was allowed to remain in her husband's house for 40 days (a period called the 'quarantine,' after the Italian word for 'forty'), during which time her dower, i.e., her life estate in one-third of her husband's lands, would be assigned to her. The heir would take outright possession of the other two thirds. But something happened before the 40-day quarantine period was over: Gertrude married Claudius. As Hamlet laments:
>
> 'Within a month,
> Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
> Had left the ushing in her galléd eyes,
> She married. O, most wicked speed.'[62]

This information gives much more practical undertones to Hamlet's muttering that his father has been "two months dead - nay, not so much, not two." (I, ii, 138), which enrich the simple contempt of mother's lustful nature.

The reasons for both, Hamlet's failure to become a king and his lack of financial resources can be explained with a certain degree of knowledge of the legal system of contemporary England and Denmark. But what the Shakespearean audience would most likely be familiar with cannot be expected to be known by modern viewers. The data thus must be either somehow meditated to the audience, via playbill, or adlibbing, or must be otherwise interpreted, which is the most common way to deal with such an issue. And the easiest way to explain this is by accenting the young prince's softness,

[62] Regnier 118.

which makes him unsuitable for the role of a monarch and a certain immaturity, which could explain why he does not have access to the inheritance.

An interesting gender-related feature of the character is connected to his relationship with women. The feeling of being gravely betrayed by his own mother leads him to generally unfavourable views of females and statements that display a certain level of misogyny, such as the famous line "frailty, Thy name is woman" (I, ii, 146). But it's not only Gertrude that fails Hamlet. Ophelia also betrays him in a way, when she allows Claudius and Polonius to listen to her debate with Hamlet. This misdemeanour nevertheless seems much less grave, as Ophelia seems to have no agency at all, showing the silent and obedient ideal femininity. When she is instructed by her father to read a prayer book, to make her being alone look more natural, she does not say a word, even though Polonious says that "'Tis too much proved, that with devotion's visage / And pious action we do sugar o'er / The devil himself." (III, i, 47 – 49) Even though Polonius makes no secret of the fact that what she is told to do is somehow evil, she does not respond, nor does she have a prescribed silent reaction. Her opinion about this plot is then entirely open to the interpretation of each production of course, but the text itself does not suggest anything but obedience.

The reason why Polonius and Claudius decide to spy on Ophelia and Hamlet undermines Hamlet's masculinity even further. They want to see whether it is his love for Ophelia that is making him act so strangely. There is a certain degree of voyeurism in the activity and it is not unreasonable to interpret it "more than a test of his sanity, [as] a test of Hamlet's manhood."[63] The text then does not indicate, whether Hamlet did or did not notice the two spies. It is once again open to interpretation. For instance, in Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film version, Hamlet does spot them. And if that is the case, the prince has stronger motivation for the following misogynous speech, where he condemns all women: "God has given you one face and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble, and you lisp, you nickname God's creatures and make your wantonness your ignorance." (III, i, 137 – 140) He seems to hate women, because they

[63] Carlos L. Dews: „Gender Tragedies," ed. Diane P. Freedman,Olivia Frey: *Autobiographical Writing Across the Disciplines: A Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) 75.

are fickle. He trusted two and both have betrayed him. Possibly he even hates the feminine side of himself, wishes to ignore it and be more like his father.

Condemning the mother's bad example as well as women in general, Hamlet becomes obsessed by his father's legacy. In the closet scene, when he shows his mother two pictures of her former and current husband he describes King Hamlet as follows:

> See what a grace was seated on this brow;
> Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
> An eye like Mars, to threaten and command;
> A station like the herald Mercury,
> New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill;
> A combination and a form indeed,
> Where every god did seem to set his seal
> To give the world assurance of a man. (III, iv, 55 – 62)

Hamlet's appreciation of the masculine is obvious and he sees his father as an idealized vision of masculinity. This idolization of Old Hamlet is very important for the prince's perception of gender. Because of the father, whom he remembers as an ultra masculine figure, a godlike warrior, Hamlet strives for a comparable level of masculinity. He is not able to achieve it though, which results in erratic behaviour on his behalf. One can only assume what sort of a relationship the two had while Old Hamlet was still alive and to what extent he appreciated the softer, or effeminate, side of his son's character. The strength of Hamlet's obsession with his father's wish may thus be endorsed by a certain level of overcompensation and endeavour to gain respect in Old Hamlet's eyes.

Furthermore, in a very intriguing essay called "Based Matter and Mnemonic Pedagogy in *Hamlet*" Lina Perkins Wilder argues that by the very fact that Hamlet obeys the Ghost's command, rather than act on the basis of his own impulses puts him into a rather feminized position. Wilder bases the argument on the traditional interpretation of the ear as a preceptor that is linked with female genitalia. This was "possibly derived from the Annunciation, since the Virgin Mary is commonly depicted

as being impregnated through the ear"[64]. Memory, as a rational disciple, is essentially to be perceived as a male domain. Men thus should look after the fickle minds of females and "impregnate" them with rational thoughts, as can be seen in the scene where Laertes persuades Ophelia to forget about Hamlet. And indeed, the Ghost seems to occupy Hamlet's memory, not only by planting the whole revenge plot into his mind, but, taking into account the previous paragraph, also by the dominating image of the masculine that Hamlet respects even though he is not suited to fulfil this ideal.

The last scene of the play is telling when it comes to Hamlet's perception of gender. The dying prince gives his vote for the future king to Fortinbras, "a warrior-hero who becomes, in Hamlet's eyes, an icon of fully achieved masculinity. In Fortinbras he sees the epitome of masculine 'honor'. This is a key concept [...] for the construction of early modern masculinity."[65] (Of course, there have been productions that had a child actor play Fortinbras, but such casting is telling none the less.) It is important to keep in mind that "in *Hamlet*, as in many of Shakespeare's plays, masculine and feminine values become polarized"[66], and Hamlet, in spite of struggling to deliver the desired impression of rigid masculinity, makes a powerful final statement by securing bright future for the nation via supporting the powerful male dictate.

2.2. Overview of Cross-gendered Staging History

Hamlet is a play with one of the longest traditions of cross-gender casting. One may argue whether the Shakespearean audience perceived the character as effeminate. Some modern critics claim that the Shakesperean audience took the play to be a philosophical piece accenting these qualities of Hamlet's monologues[67]. Also, as was stated in the previous sections, some of the elements of the text that suggest effeminacy to a contemporary reader could have been otherwise explained back at the break of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Others claim that the play was to have a strong contemporary political connotation, linking queen Gertrude to the then aging queen

[64] Lina Perkins Wilder: *Shakespeare's Memory Theatre: Recollection, Properties, and Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 108.
[65] Michael Kimmer & Amy Aronson: *Men and Masculinities* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2004) 369.
[66] ibid.
[67] Dympna Callaghan: *Hamlet: Language and Writing* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015) 168.

Elizabeth I. Benjamin Wiker and Jonathan Witt even contend that *Hamlet* is "a kind of adolescent assertion of masculinity in the shadow of a feminine power"[68], which does not mean Hamlet was to be seen as effeminate per se, but it is not that far off.

But even if Hamlet was not perceived as an effeminate character in the Rennaisance, during which being in touch with one's feminine side was not a positive trait in a man, the Romantics certainly found and appreciated these dimensions in the character, as infirmity and a certain level of effeminacy was no longer a stigma. During this period the famous "To be or not to be" became rather a sign of "terminal indecision"[69] than philosophical questioning of the world. For instance, the actor Edwin Booth, whose brother, also an actor, later became known as the one who killed president Lincoln, accented "Hamlet's intellectual and spiritual qualities, which he associated with women. He wrote in 1882 that he had 'always endeavoured to make prominent the femininity of Hamlet's character'."[70]

This tendency resulted in a tradition of women playing the part. One of the first was Sarah Siddons as early as 1775 then followed during the 19th century by Kitty Clive, Charlotte Cushman and Julia Glover, the turn of the century being marked by the performance of one of the shiniest stars of the period – Sarah Bernhardt.[71] She played the part in 1899 on stage (in France, Great Britain and The United States[72]) and then reprised it for the then very new medium of film in 1900,[73] by which she became the first Hamlet on the silver screen, as well as the star of only "the second film produced based on Shakespeare"[74]. Even though the film *Le Duel d'Hamlet* is no longer than two minutes, Bernhardt's performance counts as a memorable one in the history of both

[68] Benjamin Wiker & Jonathan Witt: *A Meaningful World: How the Arts and Sciences Reveal the Genius of Nature* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006) 47.
[69] Callagan 168.
[70] ibid.
[71] Callagan 168.
[72] R. A. Foakes: *Hamlet Versus Lear: Cultural Politics and Shakespeare's Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 25.
[73] Tony Howard: *Women as Hamlet: Performance and Interpretation in Theatre, Film and Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 1.
[74] David W. Menefee: *Sarah Bernhardt in the Theatre of Films and Sound Recordings* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2003) 97.

theatre and film, as the film used the same set as the stage version[75]. But even with this film material it is problematic to evaluate Bernhard's performance. Unsurprisingly, the reviews were mixed and did not agree even on the level of femininity that she brought to the part, a particularly harsh male critic counting her among "semi-masculine women"[76]. Even W. H. Auden remarked: "Curiously, everyone tries to identify with Hamlet, even actresses – and in fact Sarah Bernhardt did play Hamlet, and I am glad to say she broke her leg in doing it."[77] This clearly shows the contemporary (male) resistance to the very sight of a female body attacking the masculinity inscribed in the part. Even though it does not technically fall into the twentieth century, this performance paved the way for many future female Hamlets.

In fact the break of the century was a great time for experimentation with female Hamlets. It was close to the time of release of Edward P. Vining's book *The Mystery of Hamlet: An Attempt to Solve an Old Problem*, published in 1881.[78] The author finds it strange, that audiences are captivated by the character of Hamlet and sympathize with him, even though he is "weak and vacillating as he is"[79]. Vining finds the answer in the following:

> There is not only a masculine type of human perfection, but also a feminine type; and when it became evident that Hamlet was born lacking in many of the elements of virility, there grew up in him, as compensation, many of the perfections of character more properly the crown of the better half of the human race. [...] The depths of human nature which Shakespeare touched in him have been felt by all, but it has scarcely been recognized that the charms of Hamlet's mind are essentially feminine in their nature.[80]

[75]Gerda Taranow: *The Bernhardt Hamlet: Culture and Context* (Berne: Peter Lang Verlagsgruppe, 1996) 176.
[76] Foakes 25.
[77] Auden 159.
[78] Ann Thompson: "Asta Nielsen and the Mystery of Hamlet," ed. Lynda E. Boose & Richard Burt: *Shakespeare, The Movie: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV and Video* (London: Routledge, 2005) 223.
[79] ibid.
[80] Arthur F. Kinney: „Introduction," ed. Arthur F. Kinney: *Hamlet: Critical Essays* (London: Routledge, 2013) 33.

The essay is strictly Victorian in its views of masculinity and femininity, mostly associating femininity with weakness etc. and when seemingly praising the feminine, employing a rather condescending tone. The depth of the impact of this essay should not be underestimated, because, as politically incorrect some of Vining's formulations may be for the contemporary reader, the stereotypes of the masculine and the feminine are still present in the society today, however hard they are opposed. They are also one of the sources of postmodern theatre's cross-gender casting, as will be discussed further on.

It took some time for the female Hamlets to take the stages in the twentieth century Anglophone theatre. In the mean time a second, now German *Hamlet* film with a female lead was made, this time it was Dutch actress Asta Nielsen.[81] In this interpretation, heavily influenced by Vining's text[82], Hamlet is actually a cross-dressed woman, who desperately falls in love with Horatio. This version took the feminization of the character so far that "paradoxically [...] some of the actresses who took on the role [afterwards] were liberated by the fact, that they were women from the need to portray Hamlet as possessing feminine characteristics"[83], as the film clearly showed that being a woman is something that shines through and adds extra dimensions to the performance even when the cross-dressed woman take pains to pretend that she is a male and that the transition does not have to be that explicit. That is a great step towards contemporary cross-gendered versions of *Hamlet*, as it slowly paves the way to a character that is more gender ambiguous.

The next significant wave of female portrayals of Hamlet came at the break of the 1970s and 1980s. The first one took place in 1979 in London's Half Moon Theatre with Frances de la Tour in the leading part. She then told the press that "the production had nothing to do with gender or with feminism; rather, the director cast the best actor - male or female – for the role."[84] Understanding the reasons for such a statement, one might argue about the extent to which it is true. At this point theatre was starting to

[81] Thompson 233.
[82] Foakes 25.
[83] ibid.
[84] Klett 16.

move on from pigeonholing into the strict categories of masculinity and femininity. A woman did not have to choose whether to play Hamlet as a man or a woman, but simply exists in the part with the knowledge that the change of the gender of the performer will affect the audience without playing it up in any way. That is coherent with the tradition of method acting, that was by this time well established even in the culture of Western Europe and mainly USA, the country in which Konstantin Sergeyevich Stanislavski's *My Life in Art* was first published, where Michail Chekhov fled from the Communist terror and where as a result a strong branch of method acting was established, with great mentors like Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, or Sanford Meisner.

What was then de la Tour's interpretative key to understanding the character? She based her performance on the universality of Hamlet's experience, mainly as a young person: "[Hamlet is] such a universal, expressing all the emotions of youth - and life - and there isn't another part to match it"[85] Some managed to decipher this universality, such as Michael Billington from *The Guardian*, who then wrote about her performance: "She is tough, abrasive, virile and impassioned. Indeed it's a good performance compact with every female virtue except femininity."[86] Others, including contemporary critic especially interested in gender issues and feminism Michelene Wandor, who "thought that de la Tour was absorbed into the 'kitch' of a 'generalized freak-show'; she disliked the 'obvious Freudianism'; and called her 'mannered': she 'mirrors the surrounding nihilism'."[87] Just to detail the timeframe, the production took place the same year that United Nations General Assembly accepted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.[88] Gender studies as they are known today were only in the making. But this production already attempted to use gender as a tool for telling a story about something else then gender: "Hamlet was the one body of integrity in a market where flesh was the currency of corruption:

[85] Klett 16.
[86] Jill Edmonds, "Princess Hamlet," ed. Vivien Gardner, Susan Rutherford: *The New Woman and Her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre, 1850-1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) 61.
[87] Howard 270.
[88] ibid.

masculinity and femininity were redundant terms when Hamlet was the only surviving member of the human race."[89]

Based on that, Half Moon Theatre's *Hamlet* should thus be branded as gender-blind, rather than cross-gendered, as gender of the performer seems to have had very little impact on the casting. But is such casting possible in case of Hamlet? Is it possible at all? And does the fact that de la Tour did not accentuate femininity at all erase the fact that she is a woman? As Grace Tiffany correctly points out in her essay "How Revolutionary is Cross-cast Shakespeare?"

> [G]ender-blind casting, unlike colorblind casting, will remain an oxymoron. The best actor available to play King Lear could be black, but not female, because Lear's maleness is so deeply inscribed in his character that to cross-cast him would be to distort him. A *King Lear* with a woman as Lear would be signally avout Lear's femininity, and this femininity would be a directorial rather than a Shakespearean invention.[90]

Of course even casting a female Lear is possible, as will be discussed further on in the thesis, but because of the quality of the character that is embedded in the text, the vision of the director and the literary manager needs to embrace it and create an interpretation that somehow acknowledges it. These interpretations became more nuanced as gender theory developed. But in this type of theatre[91] it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to have a female portray a male character, have her act as if she was a male and either presume that it will pass unnoticed, or rely solely on her sex to add some extra quality to the performance, as such approaches lack sufficient motivation for the performer and makes the whole process as well as the end result rather confusing, which may be the case of the following production as well.

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[89] ibid.
[90] Grace Tiffany: "How Revolutionary is Cross-cast Shakespeare? A Look at Five Contemporary Productions," ed. Jay L. Halio, Lois Potter, Arthur F. Kinney: *Shakespeare, Text and Theater: Essays in Honor of Jay L. Halio* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999) 121.
[91] i.e. traditional dramatic theatre - the case is different for instance in post-modern texts, where the characters are often identified only as A, B, C etc., and their gender is not further specified

The second prominent cross-gender cast production of the 70s and 80s was created in 1982 by the director Joseph Papp for New York's Public Theatre, where Diane Venora played the part of the young prince. Venora, then branded a "virtually unknown actress"[92], went on to portray both of the female characters in the play: Ophelia (1990) and Gertrude (1999). A documentary following the rehearsal process *Rehearsing Hamlet* shows the differences of opinion between the actress and the director regarding the interaction of the prince with the female characters, particularly when it comes to the prince's relationship with Ophelia especially in the nunnery scene, the debate of which caused "much tension"[93].

Unlike Papp, who strived for "a noble, classical Hamlet" [94], because, as he stated, when talking about casting Venora: "she is a woman playing this role: that's enough [...] I don't want any criticism of her for doing something really excessive and out of the way"[95], Venora saw the character in a very different light. She "was drawn to his passion, [Hamlet's] rage, his disillusionment, and his fear."[96] And even though she was working under Papp's firm hand, this resulted in a particularly energetic performance, which was very explicit regarding Hamlet's relationship with women, thriving on the fact that the performer herself is female. During one rehearsal Papp and Venora discovered that Hamlet should not feel for Ophelia, as Venora did instinctively, but rather indulge Hamlet in her betrayal, which seems to have affected the performance to a great extent. Venora's interactions with other female cast members was then branded by critics as "unusually violent"[97], as her Hamlet "ropped letters and tossed keepsakes in Ophelia's face; he threw her to the back of the stage, menaced her like a stalker, choked her and limped off sobbing. In the 'particularly ugly' Closet scene Hamlet punched Gertrude in the ribs and dragged her down."[98]

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[92] Frank Rich: "Theater: Dianne Venora Stars in Papp's 'Hamlet'" , *NYTimes.com*, Dec 3, 1982, <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/12/03/theater/theater-diane-venora-stars-in-papp-s-hamlet.html?pagewanted=all> Feb 23, 2016.
[93] Kemp 142.
[94] ibid.
[95] Howard 277.
[96] Kemp 142.
[97] Howard 278.
[98] ibid.

The production did not receive many favourable reviews with comments including "the worst Polonius in living memory"[99], or "dreary and smarmy ghost"[100]. Venora's performance did not escape scrutiny, mostly criticised for her femininity and overt display of emotions, namely frequent crying. Various critics branded her "too girlish and tantrummy [...] like an effete homosexual [...] Hamlette [...] a nuisance, not a novelty"[101]. The example shows, that having a great performer does not automatically imply he, or she will fulfil his / her usual standard in a cross-gendered part. One may even ask, whether Papp's vision of having a woman play Hamlet, but that being sufficient and not wanting to go too far with a gendered interpretation was reasonable. Any acting performance is based on personal experience and a female Hamlet probably should not have the same motivations as a male Hamlet simply because it defies her life experience. The brutality coinciding with the crying seems to indicate that Venora may have been behaving like a man, but experiencing the situation like a woman, which is a legitimate way to approach the text, but needs to be intentional and well-motivated, not accidental. Venora nevertheless remains the actress who experienced playing Hamlet, Ophelia and Gertrude, which in itself is a great achievement.

A very prominent cross-gendered production of *Hamlet* took place in 2014 in Royal Exchange Theatre - Manchester, directed by Sarah Frankcom, in which the title role was portrayed by Maxine Peake. Apart from Hamlet there were two more cross-gendered parts in the production: Polonius, who became organized, business-minded Polonia and Rosencrantz, portrayed as a rock chick, who sniffs cocaine the moment she arrives in the palace. The production received rave reviews, as most critics praised Peake's performance. The popularity of the production resulted in a film recording released for cinemas as well as home video. The production will be analyzed in the following section of the thesis.

The most recent and truly groundbreaking interpretation of *Hamlet* took place in 2015 in The Wilma Theater. The piece was directed by Blanka Žižka, a Czechoslovak native, wife of the deceased director Jiří Žižka (who directed for example

[99] Tiffany 125.
[100] ibid.
[101] Tiffany 125 – 126.

Václav Havel's *Leaving* in the USA), with whom she founded the famous Philadelphia based stage.[102] Her Hamlet was portrayed not only by a woman, but by a woman with African heritage – British-African, Sierra Leone born actress Zainab Jah. It is the first time recorded that a black female actress takes on the part. Based on the video materials accessible, Jah's performance is powerful and her stylized speech is nearly hypnotising. Her physical training is obvious as she moves on stage, especially in the fencing scene, which shows no signs of weakness or effeminacy. Žižka claims that she was looking for an actor who she "could trust and who would trust [her] [...] an actor who possessed great presence and could easily transform onstage."[103] Zainab then became her choice, not because she is a woman, but because of her acting qualities: "Hamlet is not going to change gender because he's played by a woman, rather, I expect that Zainab is going to transform into Hamlet."[104] Žižka was interested in the political aspect of the play[105], rather than the gender one, maintaining that Zainab simply ticked all the boxes necessary: "We don't need to conceptualize or make room for her gender in the production. She is acting the part of Hamlet."[106] It is true that gender of the performer does not need to be a topic in the production, yet is not therefore meaningless. The production was in the mode of acting and set design rather anti-illusive and stylized. It seems that Jah's gender supported the vision as means of alienation, using cross-gender casting in a rather Brechtian way "to confront a profound separation between the actor and his or her role"[107]. She did not become male when playing the part, but arguably just like in Brecht's model Street Scene she stressed that she is not Hamlet, she is simply delivering a report about him.

2.3. Royal Exchange Theatre's *Hamlet* (2015)

Coming back to the more realistic mode of representation, in the previously mentioned 2014 Royal Exchange Theatre's *Hamlet* a relatively realistic, sometimes

[102] "History," *WilmaTheater.org,* <https://www.wilmatheater.org/history> 24 Sep 2015.
[103] "Hamlet Press Kit," *WilmaTheater.org,* Feb 2015 <https://wilmatheater.org/production/hamlet/press-kit> 24 Sep 2015
[104] ibid.
[105] A.D. Amorosi: "At the Wilma, a 'Hamlet' that upends expectations," *Philly.com*, 1 Apr 2015 <http://articles.philly.com/2015-04-01/entertainment/60686704_1_young-hamlet-guildenstern-rosencrantz> 25 Sep 2015.
[106] ibid.
[107] Hussein Al-Badri: *Tony Kushner's Postmodern Theatre: A Study of Political Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014) 28.

even casual style of acting is employed. Maxine Peake's powerful performance as well as the ingenious usage of her physical type exemplified what a cross-gendered performance can add to the widely known drama. With her blond pixy hairstyle, soft features, cracking voice and superb usage of posture and body language, Peake manages to create a convincing portrayal of rather frail, yet bold and energetic young prince, maintaining a certain pubescent level of masculinity, which works marvellously for the part. Catherine Belsey, among others, rightfully acknowledges a similarity to David Bowie when it comes to haircut as well as gender ambiguity[108].

The audience encounters prince Hamlet in act I scene ii, as he is attending a toast, presumably after dinner during which Claudius addresses his entourage and tries to justify his marriage to Gertrude in a politically correct manner. His speech is one of a capable statesman. During this rather official occasion the prince exhibits some, yet at this point still not overt, signs of immature behaviour – he retorts, speaks ironically, rolls his eyes, sniffs between the lines and abruptly leaves the table as he finds the situation too difficult to stomach. Claudius then points out his "unmanly grief" to which Hamlet raises his eyebrows and looks utterly fed up with the new king's exercise in rhetoric and ostentatiously replies only to his mother's plea to stay home, in spite of Claudius' previous lengthy monologue.

Building on Judith Butler's claim that gender is "tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts"[109], Peake reasserts her manliness by repetition of minor gestures and facial expressions. The character remains a male, but a male who seems to employ masquerade as means of concealing some inner insecurity. When Peake described her experience of working on the part she went on to say that:

> For me, Hamlet was a woman but she felt trapped in a male body. She was male as far as she was concerned. Gender's changing today. Male? Female? It's not always relevant to some people. They are who they are – they might not fit into a

[108] Catherine Belsey: "New Directions: *Hamlet* and Gender," ed. Ann Thompson & Neil Taylor: *Hamlet: A Critical Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) 111.
[109] Judith Butler & Maxine Elliot: *Gender Trouble: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2002) 179.

> specific box. That's what we were trying to do. And [Swinton and Bowie] are just two very cool people! … My style is quite masculine anyway so we worked from that and who I am as a person and what I feel comfortable in.[110]

This can be linked to Judith Butler's notion of drag as hyperbolic masquerade. Feeling like a woman inside, Hamlet exaggerates his masculinity. When he is alone, he becomes much frailer, lonely and desperate. Yet in the company of other he feels the need highlight his gender affiliation. He thus performs the little gendered rituals so that there is no confusion that he is indeed a male.

Interestingly, and most likely to the greatest benefit of the production, Peake's Hamlet does not come across as a transgender person. The playing up to the male stereotypes, arguably, primarily suggest youth, which is reflected upon by various characters in the play. It is a great example of how a particular reading of a character may support the performance in a way which the protagonist may not expect, but because the answers to gender-related questions of the play are not overtly explicit, as queer theory teaches that there are no straight-forward answers when it comes to gender. The performer has answers that fit his needs. It would be endlessly more complicated and indeed less convincing to imagine that she is a young man, rather than being herself, just pushed to an extreme situation, which an unfitting body and thus ascribed gender role most definitely are.

But approaching Hamlet as either being a woman, or a boy inside coincide in one element – it implies not being a grown up and strong man – a man like Hamlet's father, who he desperately tries to match, as was described in the analysis of the text. The unprotected and at times seemingly even unwanted Hamlet needs to be able to take care of himself, or at least make it seem like he can do that. Michael Billingon correctly points out that Peake as Hamlet is "caustic, watchful, spry and filled with a moral

[110] Chris Wiegand: "Maxine Peake: 'I'd like a go at playing Henry V. Yeah! Who knows?'", *TheGuardian.com*, 4 Feb 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/feb/04/maxine-peake-henry-v-hamlet-how-to-hold-your-breath> 27 Apr 2016.

disgust at the corruption she sees around her"[111]. The cosmos of the production is dishonest, harsh and indeed corrupt. The weak ones cannot survive in it and mistakes can come at a very high cost.

An interesting moment occurs when Hamlet is to encounter the Ghost. He is very bold and sends his entourage, including his close friend Horatio, away at gunpoint. He does not show a softer side throughout the following scene and does not display any signs of fear or nervous tingling, until, once again with gun in his hand, he makes his retinue swear not to tell a soul about the happenings of the night and help him pretend to be mad. As he says this, his hand, holding the gun, begins to shake. That is by all means more masculine then is generally expected of the character (take Laurence Olivier's performance in that scene). This can be explained as a delayed reaction to the highly stressful situation that has just occurred, but possibly also as putting on an exaggerated masculine show as his father may be close and that is what Hamlet believes he expects of him.

As Hamlet seemingly descends into madness, he becomes much more liberated in his behaviour, which includes overplaying his gender role. For instance, as he tells Polonia, that "Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive - Friend, look to't" (II, ii, 182 – 183), Hamlet holds a magazine, which he rolls and uses as a phallic symbol. He repeats similar sexually charged behaviour throughout the scene. He thus employs conduct which is completely unacceptable and uses it as a tool to demonstrate his madness. But during these moments the audience members, however willingly they accept Peake's Hamlet as a man, become suddenly acutely aware of the fact that the performer is actually a female. As long the performer employs everyday behaviour that is associated with being highly masculine, the gender transition is believable and shows a struggle of fulfilling a gender role convincingly. But when this playing up to a gender stereotype becomes so exaggerated, that it actually supersedes the stereotype, the illusion gets dismantled and basic Freudian terms begin to come to mind, such as penis envy, or phallic woman.

[111] Michael Billington: "Hamlet review – Maxine Peake stresses character with a caustic, spry prince," *The Guardian.co.uk*, Guardian News and Media Ltd, 17 Sept 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2004/jul/05/theatre > 12 May 2016.

Strikingly, that is not necessarily the case in Hamlet's interactions with Ophelia, especially in the nunnery scene, which certainly can be a tricky part when it comes to a cross-gendered production. But the section shows how delicately the production operates, as it shows the pain of betrayal by a loved one, not overtly sexualized, which would cheapen the whole thing, but rather demonstrating the desolation of both characters who could have provided comfort for one another. That is supported by both the interpretation of the character as well as the quality of performance of Katie West as Ophelia.

West's Ophelia is, at least in the beginning of the production, not a stereotypical obedient and mostly silent witness of the prince's seaming descent into madness. Even though she wears a 50s style dress with a Peter Pan collar (which later comes off as she loses her mind as well as control over her actions), she has a short messy haircut, which defies her fashion choice, or more likely, the socially acceptable prim and proper look. Her behaviour is also very youthful and defiant, by which she makes a perfect match for the prince. There is a strong dose of irony when she swears to her brother who discourages her from loving Hamlet that she "shall th'effect of this good lesson keep" (I, iii, 45). She then leans over the table and ostentatiously drinks wine from his glass, showing her agency.

She initially seems to be the more level-headed part of the young couple, but gradually she loses her voice. As Gertrude tells her in act III scene i that she hopes, that Ophelia can cure Hamlet's madness, Ophelia replies "Madam, I wish it may" (III, i, 43) and wants to continue the discussion, when Polonia interrupts her and sits her down. Ophelia then takes part in Polonia's scheme, by which she breaks Hamlet's trust. But, in keeping with the intricate approach to gender of the production, Ophelia's voice is not overruled by her father, or brother, but the mother. This is a significant shift in perception of femininity in the play, as Ophelia and Polonia display two very different versions of it.

Polonia, as was already mentioned, has a business-oriented mind, which brings her closer to the traditionally male sphere. This is confirmed even by her trouser suit costume. Polonia brings a lot of comedy to the production, as her professional, clean-cut

world trembles around her due to Hamlet's madness. Her inability to react with compassion and treat Hamlet like somebody who may still understand every word she says, while still trying to keep up appearances brings a lot of relief to an overall charged production. But this utter lack of sympathy once again brings her closer to the male, rather than female stereotype. Her superiority over Ophelia proves that the conflict of the production is not one of males against females, but that of traditionally masculine against the traditionally feminine, where the latter is being decimated, which more than justifies Hamlet's strife to keep his femininity hidden underneath powerful performative gestures of masculinity.

To support the feeling of blurred lines between males and females, or masculinity and femininity, even play within the play, the production of Hamlet's choice – *The Murder of Gonzago* - staged for the royal couple is cross-gender cast. The Player Queen is portrayed by Ben Stott and Player King by Claire Benedict. A possible reading of this casting choice could give an extra dimension to Hamlet's play. He does not only wish to shame his mother and uncle and reveal the crime that was committed, but also tries to undermine these notions of masculinity and femininity, as if he were asking the royal audience who is to judge whether someone' grief is "unmanly".

The creators decided for a significant dramaturgical cut, as the production ends with Horatio kissing the dead Hamlet's head and wishing him good night. There is no sign of Fortinbras, who should restore the balance in the kingdom. This only accents the message of the production, for which high politics are a setting which affects the characters' actions and creates the high-profile atmosphere in which individuality is mostly frowned upon, but are by no means its most important component. Royal Exchange Theatre's *Hamlet* is rather more personal and circles around the title character and his struggles to accept himself as well as the situation he is in. With him gone, the story is over.

Apart from what is discussed above, a great benefit of this cross-gender casting of Hamlet is that it enables a performer with the experiences of a forty-year-old to play a character that is significantly younger, but has a very complex mind that is difficult to tackle even for highly-skilled and experienced performers. There is thus no need to

compromise between appropriate age and necessary acting ability. In that respect the production works brilliantly and allows the audience to experience *Hamlet* in an entirely new way.

2.4. Cross-gendered *Hamlet* on Czech Stages

In spite of the long world-wide staging tradition, there is no recorded Czech production of *Hamlet* where the prince was portrayed by a woman in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The only instance of a cross-gender cast character in *Hamlet* is the gravedigger performed by Zdena Hadrbolcová in Jan Nebeský's 1996 production of the play. This can be linked to a different tradition of reading the character that is prominent in the Czech environment. A key portrayal of Hamlet for the Czech staging history of the play was the one of Radovan Lukavský from the National Theatre (1959) who was not a hesitant or oversensitive character, but rather a royal offspring with great philosophical foundation. As is stated in Lukavský's journal, the key to the interpretation was "the director's concept of Hamlet as a knight and Claudius as a politician. Hamlet the humanist discovers his dependence on and his responsibility to the society. Hamlet becomes a 'positive hero' in the best sense of the word: 'Not mystic fate, but clear mission.'"[112] This trend continued even in the second iconic production of *Hamlet* from 1982 with František Němec as the lead, who "was not indecisive but vigorous and quick, if a little out of his depth among the slippery political machinations at court, more of a warrior than a dreamy intellectual"[113]. In spite of the fact that this trend is not constant and many productions have portrayed Hamlet much closer to the Romantic reading of the character, there was not yet a production that went as far as casting a female to play the part.

[112] Jarka M. Burian: *Leading Creators of Twentieth-Century Czech Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2002) 174.
[113] Dennis Kennedy: *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 224.

3. KING LEAR

3.1. Analysis of the Text

Joyce Carol Oates once wrote, that "the world of *Lear* is one in which the particularized, personalized human being finds himself in some contention with his role—a representative of his species, his rank, his 'place' - King, Father, Everyman, God-on-Earth; Daughter; Bastard; Loyal Servant; Madman; Traitor."[114] Looking for a place within the society is a great theme of the play. This theme of search for identity which is prominently present in the text itself is then further complicated if one of the characters is cross-gender cast. There are two major possibilities for such casting, the first one being the monarch himself portrayed by an actress, the second one having The Fool played by the same actress that stars as Cordelia.

3.1.1. Cross-gendered Lear

In the first scenario mentioned, where the part of Lear is took on by a female performer, the topic of parenthood instantly comes to mind, or to be more precise of the difference in perception of motherhood and fatherhood and behaviour that is associated with each of the roles, which is particularly gendered, and therefore "asymmetrical to start with, both with regard to the amount of time spent with the child and with regard to physical proximity to the child. Fatherhood contains more freedom and can more easily compensate for failure than motherhood. Fatherhood is compatible with distance to the child, whereas motherhood requires closeness."[115] Even if the character remains a male, which is a more interesting alternative for the purposes of the thesis, as well as one that is more frequent when it comes to cross-gendered productions, the associations that the female performer brings are those of motherhood – nurture, care, selflessness etc. Lear lacks these qualities to a great extent and they are thus in sharp contrast with his character. Unlike Hamlet, Lear is a patriarchal father figure. But what happens if all this is undermined by the fact that his body does not correspond with his patriarchal role?

[114] Joyce Carol Oates: "Is This the Promised End?': The Tragedy of King Lear," ed. Harold Bloom: *Bloom's Shakespeare Through the Ages: King Lear* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008) 275.
[115] Cristina Grenholm: *Motherhood and Love: Beyond the Gendered Stereotypes of Theology* (Cambridge: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011) 52.

Notably, there are no mothers present in *King Lear*. Both the mother of the king's three daughters and the one of Gloucester's two sons are presumably deceased. In that Shakespeare differs from his source text, an earlier anonymous version of the play, which "opens with a speech by the hero lamenting the death of his 'dearest Queen'."[116] In Shakespeare's version there is only a single mention of Lear's wife, as the former king suggests that if Regan was not happy to see him "I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb" (II, iv, 122) as she must have been unfaithful to him and had the daughter with someone else. This absence of the mother was a topic of great interest for many artists. For instance, Sir Ian McKellen came up with a back story relating to the queen:

> I assumed he had two wives, so I wear two wedding tings. One wife gave him the two elder sisters, of a certain character that was visited in them in some way. What happened to her? Maybe she died, maybe she was put to death or maybe they got divorced? And then there was another wife, perhaps the love of his life, who gave him Cordelia. I assumed that she died in childbirth, and he brought up Cordelia himself and therefore loves her the most.[117]

Others played with the absent mother even further and presented the audience with a father in a body of a mother. This, one may argue, only strengthens the apocalyptical feeling of destabilization that is present throughout the play and is possibly not related only to power and control, but to an extent also gender roles.

In the beginning of the play the king decides to give up his power and bases his decision on who to pass the kingdom to on eloquence of his daughters' pleas. This shows Lear as the alpha male of the family, surrounded by daughters, who do what they can to please him. Lear's fatal mistake is his belief that this is a position that is granted to him not by the power of his office, but the strength of his character and role of a father and head of the family - the patriarch. For him, the strength of his position is thus somehow rooted in his masculinity. He reasserts it as he is gradually stripped off his

[116] Coppélia Kahn: "The Absent Mother in *King Lear*," ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers: *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 35.
[117] Jonathan Croall: *Performing King Lear: Gielgud to Russell Beale* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015) 169.

benefits. He explicitly tells Goneril that she has "power to shake [his] manhood" (I, iv, 252) by taking his soldiers away. He thus interprets the situation as female power taking over his patriarchal universe, forcefully trying to remove his masculinity.

And indeed as the daughters' power rises, the more helpless and, in his own eyes, less of a man Lear becomes. When in act II scene iv Lear realizes that he will not find respectful treatment even in Regan's house, he sighs: "O, how this mother swells up toward my heart! / *Hysterica* passio! Down, thou climbing sorrow. / Thy element's below." (II, iv, 52 – 54) It is fascinating, because saying that, he likes his mental state to one of a woman, referring to his pain and sorrow as "this mother". And indeed, as Coppélia Kahn explains in her essay "The Absent Mother in *King Lear*", hysteria belonged within the sphere of the feminine illnesses ever since it was first described in 1900 B. C. and was later (in the texts of Hippocrates) named as "a disease of the *hyster*, the womb"[118] and was to be cured by marriage. Tellingly Lear associates weakness with the feminine. It shows his inability to comprehend the world that surrounds him. There are no truly weak women in *King Lear*, even though their strength manifests itself differently. Cordelia is strong enough to speak up and be banished for staying true to her beliefs, whilst Goneril and Regan show no compassion for the old man, which is something that is not expected of a lady, and furthermore end up in the middle of a fierce power struggle.

The further the play proceeds, the more are the viewers reminded of the fact that the growing chaos is escalated by the women in the play - by their deceptiveness and disobedience. In the storm scene Edmund urges Lear: "Let not the creaking of shoes nor the rustling of silks betray thy poor heart to woman. Keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets, thy pen from lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend." (III, iv, 85 – 88) As the audience do not know about any bad experience Edmund is to have had with a particular female, it seems that this female fickleness must be deeply enrooted in the entire society's view of women. Also, by mentioning the brothels, he seems to sexualize this inherent guilt of women, possibly linked with the original sin, even though in Lear's case the relationship discussed is with his daughters and therefore not

[118] Coppélia Kahn: "The Absent Mother in *King Lear*" 33.

sexual at all. Yet this link between sexuality and power is something that was embedded in the Renaissance way of thinking. For instance, it was widely believed, that "each emission of sperm diminishes a man's life and powers"[119]. Within a society, where sexual activity is officially just means of procreation, not pleasure (oral, or anal sex being considered sodomy as they do not fulfil this goal), males are believed to actually sacrifice some of their own life-force for their children by the very act of conception. Strength and its distribution is thus directly linked to sex which reminds one of the twentieth century Freudian term castration anxiety.

The ending of the play is often seen as problematic as it is one of the bleakest among Shakespeare's tragedies. The entire royal family is dead and the three people remaining - Albany, Edgar and Kent – do not seem to want to, or indeed be able to restabilize the nation, in the end leaving the stage "with a dead march" (V, iii, 301). Yet one thing is certain: the only survivors are males. All of the threatening females are deceased, therefore in a way "patriarchy emerges once again as 'the only form of social organization strong enough to hold chaos at bay'"[120]. This distorted reestablishment of a traditional patriarchal order can be supported by a cross-gender cast title role. As his daughters, who defied their traditional female roles, Lear was, in such casting, also "abnormal", an abject body. His gender performance started to tremble as soon as he gave up his power, revealing the suppressed ambiguities. With him gone, the order can be restored.

Having the character of Lear portrayed by a female performer operates very differently from cross-gender performed Hamlet. In case of Hamlet the casting relies on characteristics of the prince that are to be associated with the feminine, whereas a female Lear exposes a certain level of naivety with which the former king trusts his heavily performed masculinity to secure him a respectable position forever, even when he is no longer as powerful as he once was. Such casting effectively supports his statement that he has been stripped of his masculinity as his ultra masculine gender performance trembles in the wake of a crisis, as well as strengthens the sense of post-

[119] Maria Teresa Micaela Prendergast: *Renaissance Fantasies: The Gendering of Aesthetics in Early Modern Fiction* (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1999) 31.
[120] Jay L. Halio: *King Lear: A Guide to the Play* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001) 70.

apocalyptic confusion and loss of identity ("Who is it that can tell me who I am?" I, iv, 189) even on the level of gender, where women take the traditionally male governing positions and men end up feeling helpless and emasculated. Cross-gender casting of the character also leads the audience to a more thorough questioning of Lear's parenting abilities and examining of what kind of a parent he really was, which is a question that does not seem to be as prominent in a traditional male casting, because of the difference in perception of motherhood and fatherhood.

3.1.2. Connecting Cordelia and the Fool

The second example of a possible cross-gender casting in *King Lear* is having the actress who portrays Cordelia play the part of the Fool as well. The link between the two characters sparked critical interest for over a hundred years. In 1894 Alois Brandl stated in his book *Shakespeare* that due to the brevity of a part as significant as Cordelia, one may assume that the performer who portrayed the part (and had to be qualified enough to do so) probably took on another role in the play during the time when Cordelia was offstage. Jeffrey Kahan summarizes the core of Brandl's thesis as follows: "In essence, the audience would have understood that Cordelia's presence was somehow retained whenever the boy playing Cordelia reappeared in another role. Thus Shakespeare would not have just doubled one part with another, but would have found meaningful or thought-provoking doublings."[121] The part Brandl then suggested for such doubling was the Fool.

Whether that was the case in Elizabethan productions of the play or not is uncertain. Those who oppose the theory commonly point out that it is assumed that the part of the Fool might have been portrayed by Robert Armin, who was forty two years old at the time the play was written and was thus not likely to be perceived as a boy player who could have tackled the part of Cordelia.[122] There is nevertheless not enough evidence to confirm or disprove that claim. Be it either way, it certainly does not disqualify the doubling of the parts for contemporary stages.

[121] Jeffrey Kahan: "Introduction," ed. Jeffrey Kahan: *King Lear: New Critical Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2008) 56.
[122] ibid.

The key argument supporting this doubling is the fact that the characters have a very similar function, yet do not appear on stage at the same time. Both the Fool and Cordelia tend to be honest with Lear, however brutal it may be. When Cordelia is banished, the Fool suddenly appears without an explanation of his previous absence. Because of his role as the entertainer of the court he is able to get away with much more than others, such as Kent whose bluntness gets him expelled. Cordelia and the Fool essentially represent an antidote to the flattery that stultifies Lear's brain. The greatest part of Lear's journey is his gradual gaining of self-knowledge, which comes tragically late. Martin Hilský points out that during the period of the Renaissance, flattery and pride were perceived to be the greatest obstacles to self-knowledge and that in youth and in old age people are most prone to succumb to sycophants' sweet words.[123] The best way to achieve self-knowledge is then through suffering.[124] Shakespeare makes Lear a case in point study of this phenomenon and shows its bleakness in a rather extreme yet deeply human fashion.

It is not only the unwillingness to fawn that makes both Cordelia and the Fool speak their mind and thus links them, it is also the nature of truth that they represent. It is a truth that is somehow natural, intuitive and therefore cannot be contained. Unlike Goneril, Regan or Edmund, who via nurture achieved a certain level of excellence in adapting the facts so that they fit their plans, which they cover up by eloquent speeches, Cordelia and the Fool tend not to calculate before they speak, which often puts them in dangerous positions. A Renaissance proverb claims that only "children and fools speak the truth"[125] and indeed the youngest one of Lear's daughters and his Fool are the ones that have a visceral ability to see things as they really are and honestly reflect upon them. That is in sharp contrast with the learned and experienced old king who is unable to see through the lies and anticipate or comprehend the possible gravity of consequences of his own short-sighted decisions. In order to understand that, he must descend into madness, become a fool himself and find this child-like honesty which he had lost.

[123] Hilský 594.
[124] ibid.
[125] William R. Elton: *King Lear and the Gods* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015) 324.

Linking the Fool and Cordelia leaves room for additional meaning in various lines of the text. Some of these can be entertaining, playing with the doubling of the characters. For instance, Ralph McLean points out, that the Fool's line "She that's a maid now, and laughs at my departure, / shall not be a maid long, unless things be cut shorter." (I, v, 42- 43) has two meanings in such casting. Not only the primary one, where he rather suggestively explains that in presence of his witty humour no woman is safe to stay a virgin, but also a secondary level "whereby when 'things are cut shorter' the actor playing the Fool will cease to perform his male role in the play and will instead reassume the role of Cordelia."[126] Others deepen the meaning of the Fools lines, give them more personal overtones than the otherwise slightly distanced commentator has. That occurs for instance as the Fool tells Lear that he "madest thy daughters thy mothers. For when thou gavest them the rod, and put'st down thine own breeches" (I, iv, 133 - 135). Especially when discussing familial bonds, the audience cannot help relating the two characters and perceive their joint strife to open Lear's eyes to the truth.

The greatest difference between the characters is their ability or willingness to be vocal. Cordelia is a relatively quiet character who restricts her speech to the very minimum, by which she differs greatly from her two sisters. When asked what she will do to surpass her sisters' rhetorical abilities, her answer is a simple "Nothing." (I, i, 82) She then attempts to develop the idea honestly and matter-of-factly, yet the enraged Lear, whose ego has been hurt, is not willing to listen. The Fool then echoes this "nothing" as one of his frequent reminders of Lear's error of judgment. In the finale of one of his eloquent and highly rhythmical orations he asks Lear "Can you make no use of nothing, nuncle?" (I, iv, 115) Saying that the Fool seems to attempt to remind him of Cordelia and bring Lear's suppressed need to reconcile with her to light. But Lear goes on to show that he is by far not ready to do that, replying "Why no, boy. Nothing can be made out of nothing." (I, iv, 16), entirely failing to notice the hint. Both Cordelia and the Fool push Lear to self-knowledge, but as Cordelia failed to do it silently, the Fool attempts to make it right by excessive use of language. In a doubled production the

[126]Ralph McLean: "'And My Poor Fool Is Hanged' - The Double Role Of Cordelia And The Fool In *King Lear*", *Britain In Print.net* <http://www.britaininprint.net/study_tools/poor_fool_lear.html> 28 Jun 2016.

audience may feel that in a way the Fool gives Cordelia a more powerful voice and verbalizes her silent manifesto until Lear finally starts to see its true meaning.

In act III scene iv the Fool abruptly exits the stage and never comes back. That is usually explained by Edgar taking over the Fool's function and leading Lear to the realization that he was the fool all along. Moreover, he leaves with, when compared with the rest of his speeches, a rather underwhelming line "And I'll go to bed at noon." (III, vi, 41) In some productions that wanted to make sense of this strange withdrawal of the character, the Fool accepted his defeat at this point and the line was interpreted as "acceptance of unreality - a purposive pretence that things are other then they are"[127]. But if the part of the Fool and Cordelia are doubled there is a much more practical reason for the Fool's exit, as it simply makes space for Cordelia's return. The Fool then cannot re-join the king in the final stages of his life, because with Cordelia's death the guidance and compassion that the two characters represented is now irretrievably gone.

The line that is most commonly used as basis for this double casting is from Lear's final speech, where he remarks "and my poor fool is hanged" (V, iii, 279), referring to Cordelia's death. The line is rather ambiguous. The easiest possible interpretation is, that "the word 'fool' takes on its conventional meaning as 'child'"[128]. Some also took it as an example of the way that "Lear's thoughts, at this late stage, glance rapidly from one topic to another"[129], which is a reading that was employed for instance in the Barry Kyle's 2001 production of the play in the Globe Theatre, where "the Fool's hanging corpse could be seen through the central doors and the end of Act 3, scene 6, thus explaining his subsequent absence and Lear's comment in Act 5."[130] But in case of doubling of the parts, this is the point when the two characters finally merge even in Lear's mind. He finally understands that they are the ones who had his well-being on their mind the whole time. Throughout the play the Fool calls Lear unceremoniously "nuncle" - "a child-like shortening of 'mine uncle'"[131], which, even though it of course does not suggest any blood relation, shows the depth of the

[127]William Shakespeare: *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ed. Jay L. Halio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 198, note 41.
[128] Marjorie Garber: *Shakespeare After All* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008) 674.
[129] Cedric Watts: *Shakespeare Puzzles* (London: Publish Nations, 2014) 106.
[130] ibid.
[131] Ben Crystal: *Springboard Shakespeare: King Lear* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) 40.

relationship between the two. But it is not until now that the former king finally "established the crucial link between Cordelia and the Fool as [his] true progeny"[132].

3.2. Cross-gendered Staging History

3.2.1. Cross-gendered Lear

The staging tradition of cross-gender cast Lear is understandably much shorter than that of Hamlet, as the reading goes much more against the grain and is more experimental. The first woman to attempt to tackle the part was Ruth Maleczech in January 1990 in New York's experimental theatre company Mabou Mines. The production was directed by Maleczech's husband and the company's co-founder Lee Breuer who transformed the classical play's setting into a "gaudy, earthy, raucous world of the American 'white-trash' underclass"[133]. The 1950's atmosphere of the production Americanized the decay in the play and brought it to the realm of Southern Gothic. Some critics even point out the characters' similarity to those of Tennessee Williams:

> Lear (Ruth Maleczech) could be a Tennessee Williams Big Mama. Her evil sons Goneril and Regan are bourbon-swilling good ol' boys who have their way with the bastard Elva (nee Edmund), a hot number in tight leather jeans, in the back seat of a convertible. The fool, a transvestite wearing a tatty fur coat and wielding a dildo instead of a coxcomb, is divine, if not exactly Divine.[134]

The production swapped the gender of Lear and the daughters in order to make a point about present-day perception of gender that in some respects did not evolve that much from the highly patriarchal one that is presented in the play. Maleczech herself commented on that as follows: "When a man has power, we take it for granted [...] but when a woman has power we're forced to look at the nature of power itself."[135] The wish to explore these topics resulted in an adaptation of the text, where the genders of the characters were appropriated (he became she etc.) and "Lear's 'manhood' became

[132] Samuel Crowl: *Shakespeare Observed: Studies in Performance on Stage and Screen* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992) 126.
[133] Amy S. Green: *The Revisionist Stage: American Directors Reinvent the Classics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 104.
[134] Frank Rich: "Mabou Mines Creates a 'King Lear' All Its Own", *NYTimes.com*, The New York Times Company, 26 Jan 1990 <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/01/26/theater/reviews-theater-mabou-mines-creates-a-king-lear-all-its-own.html > 22 Jun 2016.
[135] Green 104.

his 'motherhood'."[136] This textual change points directly to the experimental nature of the production, as for Lear in the original text his manhood initially seems to be of much higher importance than his parenthood. The fear of shaking one's manhood, for which he rebukes Goneril, is a rather self-centred and chauvinistic concern, whereas worrying about a child's shaking of one's motherhood, even though it may be used as a control mechanism, implies a fear for a corroding relationship.

All the above shows quite clearly that Mabou Mines opted for an adaptation of the gender of the character to fit their interpretation of Lear as a woman, but a woman that is in control as a man would be, rather than presenting the audience with a character whose gender is more ambiguous. The reason for that is the feminist agenda that inspired the whole process. Lee Breuer correctly points out that a great theme of the play is "the relationship between power and love. A man can be powerful and still be loved, but it's rare to see a woman loved for her power – women must be powerless. So as women gain power in our society, they also find love more difficult to attain."[137] In spite of operating within the binary perception of gender, the Mabou Mines production opened the doors for the following cross-gendered Lears that took the stage in the following years.

This next production of a cross-gendered *King Lear* took place only a few months after the premiere of the Mabou Mines version. Even though the production was not held on an Anglophone stage, it should still be mentioned in the thesis as it was directed by one of the greatest American directors of the twentieth century Robert Wilson. As Wilson commonly works in Germany, enjoying the cooperation with perfectly trained German actors, he put on this production in Frankfurt, casting then eighty-year-old actress Marianne Hoppe in the main part.[138] Having the production "located 'in a postmodern no man's land'"[139] enabled the artists to create a far more gender-ambiguous character. Hoppe, being initially sceptical about the idea, gradually

[136] ibid.
[137] Lesley Ferris: "Lear's Daughters and Sons," ed. Sharon Friedman: *Feminist Theatrical Revisions of Classic Works: Critical Essays* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008) 101.
[138] Ferris 101.
[139] Susan Bennett: *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London: Routledge, 2013) 76.

felt that "its absurdity began to appeal to [her]"[140] and ended up creating a character who remained a male as far as the textual basis was concerned, yet allowed the reality of the text to be confronted with the reality of her body. As the actress stated in an interview: "I will not try to play a man, but I will forget I'm a woman. It's difficult being suspended between male and female. 'Lear' is a jungle. It's so great and so dangerous."[141]

A certain level of neutralization of gender (albeit of course not complete) is made possible by Robert Wilson's style of directing. His productions usually rely heavily on the visual aspects and precise mise-en-scène as well as very particular stage movement, which frequently leave the actors feeling like puppets, yet achieve a rather unique albeit depersonalized overall effect. The stylization is so heavy that even in highly emotional pivotal scenes of his productions the characters "rarely address each other, let alone look at each other"[142]. This alienation effect, however popular especially in Germany, is difficult for some actors to stomach. Hoppe herself commented on his technique later on: "This Wilson can't fool me. I started out at the Deutches Theater with Max Reinhardt. I know what a director is. Wilson is not a director. He's a lighting designer. A Wilson actor runs here or there only because there's a change in the lights on the Wilson stage. Light pushes the actor around."[143]

But the cross-gender casting of the main character has a very specific purpose in the work. For Wilson *King Lear* is not about power and even less about its gender implications. It is a play about the process of dying, whose universal quality he attempted to incorporate into Hoppe's performance: "Marianne Hoppe's outward appearance and voice indentify the death as that of an old lady, while the accompanying words quality it as the death of an old man – Lear. It is the death of an old human being, beyond any particular identity."[144] Doing that Wilson attempted to achieve the opposite

[140] Ferris 100.
[141] Arthur Holmberg: "'Lear' Girds for a Remarkable Episode", *NYTimes.com*, The New York Times Company, 20 May 1990 <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/05/20/theater/theater-lear-girds-for-a-remarkable-episode.html?pagewanted=all> 23 Jun 2016.
[142] Maria Shevtsova: "Robert Wilson," ed. John Russell Brown & Stephen Di Benedetto: *Designers' Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 2016) 124.
[143] Shevtsova 124.
[144] Erika Fischer-Lichte: *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2014) 64.

effect then Lee Breuer did in Mabou Mines while employing cross-gender casting, as Breuer was pointing out the differences between what the society perceive as traditionally masculine and feminine specifically in connection to power, whereas Wilson worked with the underlying unity of all human beings who are determined by their final destination.

The first British production of cross-gendered *King Lear* took place in 1997 in Leicester's Haymarket Theatre, later moving to Young Vic for which the director Helena Kaut-Howson chose Katryn Hunter to play the part of the aging king. Similarly to the pattern that was already showing in the contemporary cross-gendered productions of *Hamlet*, in spite of the fact that "gender was a crucial factor in Kaut-Howson's *King Lear*, the director and her leading actress were anxious to prove that gender issues were not a major component of their production"[145], claiming that to them, just like to Wilson, the play is about aging which is not gender-specific.

For Kaut-Howson the main reason for choosing *King Lear* and working on it in such a specific way was her mother's recent passing. At the age of eighty-seven her previously vital mother, who bravely faced the evils of World War II in Nazi occupied Poland, began to deteriorate both physically and mentally: "in the last year or so her memory went, and she refused to acknowledge what was going on around her. That transition and her loss of power must have been traumatic for her, as it was for me."[146] This deeply personal experience then translated into the production, setting the beginning and the end of the play into a present day hospital room where an old woman is watching *EastEnders* and suffers a heart-attack, after which she is transformed into Lear.[147] All this creates a framing narrative for the play that is to come. The actualization is understandable given the circumstances, yet was not always seen favourably by the critics, mostly because of the excessive subjectivity of such a reading. For instance, Charles Spenser from *The Telegraph* wrote that "The idea, I suppose, is

[145] Klett 57.
[146] Croall 67.
[147] Klett 67.

that the play takes place inside a dying woman's head, but it seems to me monstrous arrogance to 'explain' *King Lear* in this way".[148]

In spite of the critical words above, the critics seem to have generally agreed with the creators' claim that the gender of the protagonist did not matter. But that is a rather simplified statement, because even if one does not mind the cross-gender casting, or the production is not particularly interested in playing with gender stereotypes, the truth of the matter is that Hunter's gender was not erased simply by playing a male character. The two gender identities that appear in the performance therefore do not negate each other establishing an entirely neutral gender, but they coexist, creating a multitude of possibly conflicting meanings. Elizabeth Klett points out inconsistencies regarding the matter in interviews with the director:

> Although Kaut-Howson told me that as Lear Hunter was 'completely genderless,' she also said in her interview with Whitley, 'I think you get something richer if a woman does it and also, in this case, it presents an insight into an aging man.' There is a contradiction in Kaut-Howson's interpretation: on the one hand, she felt that casting Hunter in the role helped to shift the focus from gender to age. On the other hand, she also felt that Hunter brought something to the role that a man could not possibly have done: her gender, which allowed her to play the maleness of the character and to use her own femaleness to create a Lear that embodied both gender identities.[149]

In spite of not being explicitly mentioned either by the creators or by the critics, this basic contradiction allowed the actress to explore the ambiguous polarities that the character needs to deal with: "the tension between Lear's polarized roles of hunter and hunted, father and mother, king and man"[150].

Robert Butler from *The Independent* points out that "[Hunter's] tyrannical authority only exists in so far as it is accepted by others. Take away that fear of her and

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[148] Charles Spencer: "Old Mrs Lear is not every inch a king", *The Telegraph.co.uk*, Telegraph Media Group, 1 Mar 1997 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4707784/Old-Mrs-Lear-is-not-every-inch-a-king.html> 24 Jun 2016.
[149] Klett 58 – 59.
[150] Klett 59.

this spidery, frail autocrat is impotent."[151] It should be noted that Hunter is five feet tall, thin and at the time of the performance was only thirty nine years old. But it is not only her size that supported this frailty that Butler comments upon, Jan Tříska who played the part in Prague in 2003 has a similar frame, yet the result is amplified by the cross-gender casting, because the contradictions within the character that is present on stage are multiplied by the body and gender performance of the actor: "Hunter did not 'fit' the role of Lear, which is nearly always played by an older (and usually larger) male actor; yet it was precisely because of her singular, even strange, physical presence that she was able to embody the contradictory nature of the character."[152] This resulted in a character that was not genderless, but had various levels of masculinity and femininity in a complex and ambiguous fusion.

The fact that cross-gendered Lear does not cease to be popular among theatre-makers can be proved by the Old Vic production the rehearsals of which will begin in August and is set to premiere in October 2016.[153] The piece will be directed by Deborah Warner, who has already experienced directing cross-gendered Shakespeare when she did *Richard II* with Fiona Shaw in 1995 in the National Theatre's stage Cottesloe Theatre. This time the title part will be performed by Glenda Jackson, who returns to stage after twenty five years which she spent in politics. Yet after seeing "her great friend, the Spanish actress Nuria Espert, play Lear in Barcelona 13 months ago"[154] she decided to make this great yet doubtlessly highly demanding stage comeback.

3.2.2. Cordelia and the Fool

The second possible cross-gender casting in the play – doubling of the Fool and Cordelia - has a much longer theoretical tradition than the practical one. This casting was possibly rediscovered for the twentieth century stage as late as 1972 (78 years after

[151] Robert Butler: "Real is the one thing it isn't", *Independent.co.uk*, 1 March 1997 <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/real-is-the-one-thing-it-isnt-theatre-1270618.html> 24 Jun 2016.
[152] Klett 59.
[153]Telegraph Reporters: "Queen Lear: Glenda Jackson to star as Shakespeare's ageing king" *The Telegraph.co.uk*, Telegraph Media Group, 12 Feb 2016 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/actors/glenda-jackson-to-star-as-king-lear/> 25 Jun 2016.
[154]Baz Bamigboye:"Queen Lear! Glenda Jackson, 79, returns 25 years on to play Shakespeare's king", *DailyMail.co.uk*, Daily Mail & General Trust, 12 Feb 2016 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-3443347/Queen-Lear-Glenda-Jackson-79-returns-25-years-play-Shakespeare-s-king.html> 25 Jun 2016.

the publishing of Brandl's essay) by Piccolo Teatro di Milano where the iconic director Giorgio Strehler cast Ottavia Piccolo in both parts.[155] In the production Strehler employed the techniques he usually worked with: comedia dell' arte, circus, grotesque and pantomime which combined with the nature of the text resulted in a surprisingly stylized, yet highly emotionally charged performance. The perspective he took was very fresh and contemporary. The perception of the play famously changed after World War II, from Nahum Tate's happy ending that was still widely popular in the 19th century to the bleak apocalyptic vision of the world that can be seen in the brilliant 1971 film version by Grigori Kozintsev. In keeping with the latter approach Strehler was inspired by two of the most innovative theatre-makers of post-war theatre: "*Re Lear* effectively combined the aggressive Brechtian clowning, which would make Shakespeare's play relevant in contemporary political terms with the timeless moral questions raised by Beckett's clowns." In such a world, the link between the Fool and Cordelia is all the more important, as it brings a sense of hope, love and care to the spreading wasteland. This is reinforced by the fact that as the Fool guides Lear through the depths of despair there is a female presence that instinctively softens the situation and brings in a level of attentiveness that would be expected of an offspring. The doubling thus added a much needed softness to a brutal and cruel cosmos, as Piccolo "stressed tenderness in the middle of chaos and indomitable father-daughter love in the middle of all-destroying hatred."[156]

It took another quarter of a century for doubling of the Fool and Cordelia to reach the Anglophone sphere. In 1998 Julyana Soelistyo was cast in both parts for Daniel Fish's production of the play for New Jersey Shakespeare Festival.[157] Information about the production are scarce and rather contradictory. On the one hand *Variety's* Robert L. Daniels talks about Soelistyo bringing "a touch of sweet dignity and purity to the role of Cordelia and doubles as Lear's Fool with impudent, elfin charm. Her Fool spouts wry, whimsical wisdom in fanciful rhyming couplets, and moves about

[155] David L. Hirst: *Giorgio Strehler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 79.
[156] Kennedy 219.
[157] Katharine Goodland &John O'Connor: *A Directory of Shakespeare in Performance Since 1991: Volume 3, USA and Canada* (New York: Palgrave Milican, 2011) 962.

with nimble grace."[158]Alvin Klein from *The New York Time*s on the other hand claims that Soelistyo's performance "further unbalances the proceedings, though not by directorial intent. Her ineffectual Cordelia curries favor for her supposedly evil sisters. Ms. Soelistyo is of light weight, in body and in performance."[159] However contradictory the two views are, the latter clearly did not base its critical remarks on the doubling itself, but on the quality of the performance. It can therefore be claimed that albeit not a great start for this tradition on the Anglophone stages from a technical point of view, the interpretation did not shock or alienate the audience at all.

In 2013 the doubling appeared on the British Isles. It was employed in Bill Buckhurst's production of the play in the Globe Theatre, where the two parts were portrayed by Bethan Cullinane. In a theatre such as Globe the doubling will always seem more practical and efficient then on a standard proscenium stage, as it fits with the staging tradition, especially if a production employs doubling multiple times. Charles McNulty of *Los Angeles Times* confirms that with the following statement: "Some of the doubling is routine. Cordelia and the Fool don't have scenes together, so it's not unheard of to have these roles filled by the same actor. Bethan Cullinane is more memorable as Lear's youngest daughter than she is as his jester."[160] Her performance was nevertheless highly praised (including her performance as the Fool, which David Patrick Stearns called "magnetically irreverent"[161]), reflecting the important interpretive basis for such a casting. As Catherine Love from *Exunt Magazine* claims that:

> Cullinane lends a tender watchfulness to this Fool, suggesting the constant presence and care of Cordelia even after her estrangement from her father, placed in stark contrast with the abusive behaviour of her sisters. Perhaps most

[158] Robert L. Daniels: "Review: 'King Lear'", *Variety.com*, 21 Sept 1998 <http://variety.com/1998/legit/reviews/king-lear-7-1200455087/> 26 Jun 2016.
[159] Alvin Klein: "A Discarded King's Sad Lesson in Love", *NYTimes.com*, 27 Sept 1998 <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/09/27/nyregion/theater-review-a-discarded-king-s-sad-lesson-in-love.html> 26 Jun 2016.
[160] Charles McNulty: "Globe's compact 'King Lear,' at the Broad, lacks needed heft", *LA Times.com*, Los Angeles Times Media Group, 6 Nov 2014 <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-king-lear-review-20141107-column.html> 1 Jul 2016.
[161]David Patrick Stearns: "A stripped-down 'Lear' stresses the language", *Philly.com*, Philadelphia Media Network, 26 Sept 2014 <http://www.philly.com/philly/columnists/david_patrick_stearns/20140926__Lear__at_the_Annenberg__Stripped_down__with_stress_on_language.html> 1 Jul 2016.

> importantly, the two roles add vital colour to one another, offsetting the bland virtue of Cordelia and the potential tedium of the Fool's relentless jesting.[162]

In spite of the overall praise of the performance it can be telling that most of the critical reflections of the production are from its US tour. This possibly hints at a certain level of conservatism that usually attracts the foreign audience more than the British one. Also when Cullinane was asked about the doubling, her primary answer was concerned with the historical aspect of such casting rather than the thematic one.[163]

This importance of staging history for this approach to the play may be also a part of the reason why none of the critics reflected upon the gender of her Fool, as the doubling was mostly seen as a part of a staging convention. When asked about the gender of her Fool in the third week of rehearsals Cullinane stated: "I think it's kind of driving towards a 'he'. I don't want to go down the root of deciding to make him a woman, which brings a lot of – not baggage – but a lot more connotation to the play."[164] That is definitely true, as it may result in a version where it would seem that Cordelia disguised herself as the Fool to be able to stay close to her father. Nevertheless, based on the relative lack of interest of the possible gender implications of this approach it can be assumed that on a stage that depends so much on historical staging conventions the effect of doubling characters may tend to be similar to the one of single-gender cast production, which will be further analyzed in the fourth section of the thesis regarding *Romeo and Juliet*. Essentially, the doubling becomes a part of the language of the production and becomes much more unconditionally accepted by the audience.

The most recent example of the Fool / Cordelia doubling took place in Phoenix's Southwest Shakespeare Company in 2015. The production was directed by Jared Sakren and the two parts were performed by Allison Sell.[165] Most likely in order to link the

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[162]Catherine Love: "King Lear", *ExeuntMagazine.com*, 26 May 2013 <http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/king-lear-7/> 1 Jul 2016.
[163]"Cordelia/Lear's Fool Played by Bethan Cullinane", *Shakespeares Globe.com*, 7 May 2013 <http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discovery-space/adopt-an-actor/archive/cordelia-lear-s-fool-played-by-bethan-cullinane/rehearsal-1> 27 Jun 2016.
[164] ibid.
[165] Kerry Lengel: "Theater review: 'King Lear,' 'As You Like It'", *azcentral.com*, 21 Jan 2015 <http://www.azcentral.com/story/entertainment/arts/2015/01/21/theater-review-king-lear-like/22067609/> 28 Jun 2016.

apocalyptical feeling of the ultimate decay and fratricidal division of society with some real recent historical experience, the director Jared Sakren decided to go for a setting of "the siege of Sarajevo in the 1990s, with the action playing out against a backdrop of skeletal concrete walls covered in graffiti"[166]. Szell's "irresistible"[167] performance was then praised by the critics. Based on the pictures from the production, the Fool's makeup resembled one of a mime clown, with a full white face and black vertical lines around the eyes, giving her a certain level of androgyny, as clowns are in various clowning schools perceived as sexless (even though Dario Fo critically points out "unisex [...], that is, male"[168]). That is in contrast with Cordelia's girly white dress, creating one of the greatest visual gaps between the two characters, which is similar or possibly even vaster that in Strehler's case. The division was also rooted in Szell's performance: "Her body stature, that includes nervous ticks for the Fool and a stoic royal demeanor for Cordelia, also make her almost unrecognizable between the two roles."[169]

The fact that none of the reviewers above reflect upon the gender identity of the Fool only supports the previously suggested statement that the basis for the doubling is not as dependent on gender stereotypes and their achieving or transgressing, but rather on the similar function of the two characters in the text. To some even the natural truth and honesty that they both represent is to be linked with the feminine in general: "As Germaine Greer states, 'A fool is "natural," simple as we say, and by extension, still in a state of nature.' According to Juliet Dusinberre, in Shakespeare's world 'Women, Fools and rustics' are linked by their low status and links to 'nature.'"[170] That is also why cross-cast Fools (with no further link to Cordelia) appear quite frequently on Anglophone and even Czech stages. Since 1838 when Priscilla Horton took on the part, actresses such as Emma Thompson, or Linda Kerr Scott portrayed Lear's Fool.[171] The femininity of the Fool is thus important for all the reasons detailed above, even though

[166] ibid.
[167] ibid.
[168] Dario Fo: *Tricks of the Trade* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 199.
[169] Gil Benbrook: "King Lear - Southwest Shakespeare Company", Talkin Broadway.com, <http://www.talkinbroadway.com/page/regional/phoenix/phnx156.html> 29 Jun 2016.
[170] Ferris: "Lear's Daughters and Sons"106.
[171] Halio 100.

overlooked by the reviewers. If not, one may argue that similar effect will be achieved by having a male performer play both parts, cross-gender casting Cordelia, which is doubtlessly not the case.

The link with Cordelia is nevertheless much more than just an extension of this sense of being truthful, close to the nature, nurturing and overall more traditionally feminine as the familial bond adds much more complexity to the relationship with Lear (and therefore this relationship was of more interest for the reviewers). That clearly does not negate the gender implications of the cross-casting, but the sense of genuine care, concern overall depth of the relationship that is so important for the doubling seems to be even more powerful than the colliding gender identities. In other words it is more important that it is Cordelia than that it is a woman. The doubling is thus enriched by an extra dimension and therefore surpasses statements about gender identity of the character, however complex, and adds new qualities to non-gender-related issues in the play.

3.3. Cross-gendered *King Lear* on Czech stages

There are not any recorded productions in which the character of Lear is being performed by a female performer in the Czech Republic, or Czechoslovakia, which, considering the level of experimentation that is involved in the process is not particularly surprising. As was already suggested, there have been two cross-gendered Fools on Czech stages: in the 1988 production of the play in Divadlo J. K. Tyla in Pilsen directed by Ota Ševčík, where the Fool was played by Ilona Vaňková and in the 1998 production by Michal Dočekal in Divadlo Komedie in Prague, who cast Viola Zinková into the part[172], which points to an interest in re-examination the character of the Fool. But there are also two instances of the Fool / Cordelia doubling.

The first one took place in Západočeské divadlo Cheb in 1975, in a production directed by Jan Grossman, one of the greatest Czech theatre-makers, who was prohibited to work in Prague at the time. Sadly, this production is rather poorly documented, leaving only scarce remarks confirming the doubling, with Libuše

[172]"Inscenace - Král Lear - Divadlo Komedie 14. 11. 1998", *Divadelní ústav*, <http://vis.idu.cz/ProductionDetail.aspx?id=2662&mode=0> 15 Jun 2016.

Holečková[173] cast in both parts. Grossman's dramaturge and close friend prof. Miloslav Klíma remembers the doubling as "not new, yet interesting and filled with meaning."[174]

The second was a part of Jan Nebeský's 2011 production created for the National Theatre in Prague. The production itself was perceived as rather controversial. It combined Nebeský's innovative postmodern style with the text of the untouchable bard in the space of the theatre that the nation built to itself, yet felt somehow alienated and shocked by the production, in spite of some rave reviews. The production's treatment of the Fool / Cordelia doubling will be analyzed in the following section of the thesis.

3.4. *King Lear* in the National Theatre in Prague (2011)

Branding Nebeský's production controversial may be an understatement. It was known to be a production that made many audience members reach for the coat during the intermission, but those who stayed and enjoyed it commonly praised the production as the greatest theatrical event of the season. Jan Nebeský is known not to give interviews and letting the work speak for itself. He did not make an exception when it came to *King Lear* and therefore many of its startling images remained unexplained. Kateřina Winterová who was cast as the Fool and Cordelia was then the one to answer questions regarding the doubling: "They both love Lear and want his rectification, in a sense of not suffering any more, allow him to look back at his life and his behaviour and be able to change it in some way. [...] Simply be happier."[175] This confirms that the link between the characters was established on a thematic rather than historical or conventional basis, which is to be expected in a production that is anything but conventional.

The production's first act is set by a swimming pool without water into which each of the daughters jump when describing their love for Lear in the first scene. Combining powerful animations projected over the performers (such as eruptions of swastikas and sickles) and heavy usage of music and singing (many of the speeches

[173] "Libuše Holečková" <http://encyklopedie.cheb.cz/cz/osudy/libuse-holeckova> 10 Aug 2016.
[174] Miloslav Klíma: "Období vyhnanství," ed. Jan Dvořák, Zuzana Jindrová, Miloslav Klíma: *Jan Grossman – Interpretace* (Praha: Pražská scéna, 1998) 103.
[175] *Divadlo žije*, Česká televize, Praha, Czech Republic, 30 Nov 2011.

became arias) Nebeský creates a fragmented slowly decomposing world, where nothing is stable and is in desperate need of a new order. As Cordelia is getting ready to jump, she shakes her fingers, trying to calm herself down and push through the obviously unpleasant situation. Ultimately deciding not to perform a similar spiel as her sisters Cordelia does not sing the expected praise, but takes off her swimming goggles and talks calmly, hoping her honesty will be sufficient. Lear instantly banishes her, without as much as looking at her, standing high above on a diving platform.

Nebeský and his dramaturge Iva Klestilová decided to make major cuts to the text, making this the last time the audience sees Cordelia before her re-emergence close to the end of the play. Soon Lear begins to look for his Fool. Winterová's costume for the Fool becomes a mixture of Cordelia (swim cap, belt) and Lear (too long sleeves, white briefs and brown shoes). The Fool therefore becomes a version of Cordelia that is more acceptable to Lear, giving him the ability to guide the ageing king. Language-wise the gender of the Fool does not change, yet Winterová's performance is very naturally feminine, creating a mind-boggling combination perfect for the landscape in which the production is set and the overall postmodern nature of the production.

Moments of farcical entertainment, when the Fool jumps around and performs music or stand-up numbers (frequently facing the audience, not Lear) are altered with genuine concern for the former king, during which the audience are allowed to see glimpses of Cordelia in the Fool. Seeing that Kent has spent the night in stocks offends Lear so deeply, that his health seems to be damaged: he talks with difficulty, his movement is spasmodic, breathing disjointed. Observing Lear struggling to conceal his pain leaves the Fool deeply worried. He starts to flick his fingers nervously, reminding the audience of Cordelia's hesitation by the pool. The presence of this Cordelia-like Fool thus gives the audience a certain level of comfort, knowing that somebody who cares for Lear as for a relative is there to support him, as well as allowing them to see the fear of decay of a loved one in Winterová's brilliantly nuanced performance.

In act III the Fool becomes Lear's carer rather than entertainer. The storm is suggested by three showers in which Lear keeps falling. The Fool then tries to comfort him and dry him with napkins. The Fool's costume has changed into a prison uniform,

which, amongst all the chaos, makes his prophecy all the more chilling: "Then comes the time, who lives to see't, / That going shall be used with feet." (III, ii, 91 – 92) The speech is followed by a line of people carrying suitcases, then stripping naked and entering the shower combined with a projection of flames, alluding to the Holocaust. The apocalypse is coming; nothing makes sense anymore, only madness. And the Fool cannot guide Lear there. He is confused by Edgar / Tom's mad behaviour which Lear mimics, and tries to stop it. As the scene comes to its end and Lear goes to sleep the Fool takes off his costume, leaving Cordelia's original swimsuit and swim cap. After that he gives his ultimate line "And I'll go to bed at noon." (III, vi, 41) finalizing the transformation. The next time Winterová enters the stage she is queen Cordelia, all grown up, calm, elegant in a long dress, once again in sharp contrast with her semi-naked, dishevelled, bawling sisters. But if the director's approach to the text was unconventional so far, the truly radical changes are yet to come.

After act IV there is a pause, allowing a fundamental change of setting. Fragments of the final act take place at a vernissage, where among the paintings by Margita Titlová-Ylovsky hang two rather familiar exhibits – Lear and the Fool / Cordelia, now morphed into one character – speaking some of Cordelia's lines, yet wearing the Fool's prison uniform from act III. The rest of the characters, now noticeably older, walk around them, oblivious to anything they say, showing the superficiality and essential meaninglessness of contemporary human existence. Vladimír Hulec interprets it as a possible "reflection of ourselves, who go to vernissages, sit in the audience and without understanding, without real feeling, gazing at the world, watching its devastation, destruction of the civilization, the end of ourselves. We drink coffee indifferently and walk from one exhibit to another."[176]

The doubling of the Fool and Cordelia may not be based on gender stereotypes, yet what is obvious, even when it comes to such an original approach to the text, is that it brings a strengthened level of care and loving concern for the former king that is mediated through the Fool. It is not only the link with Cordelia, but the overall feminine

[176] Vladimír Hulec: "Král Lear v Národním je divadelní událostí roku", *E15.cz*, Serafico investment s.r.o., 15 Nov 2011 <http://magazin.e15.cz/kultura/kral-lear-v-narodnim-je-divadelni-udalosti-roku-717431> 1 Jul 2016.

energy that the performer brings to the harshest of situations that effectively ensures the audience that Kent is there to protect Lear's body and the Fool to console his hurting mind. As the tendency to create harsher and harsher environment for Lear's awakening strengthens[177], the need for this consolation and human touch is all the more relevant.

[177] This tendency may be seen for instance in the brutality of Edward Bond's *Lear*.

4. ROMEO AND JULIET

4.1. Analysis of the Text

Till this very day the tale of the two tragic lovers of Verona counts as one of the most iconic love stories ever written. As such it has been frequently retold, adapted and modified to fit the needs of the contemporary audience and reflect the present state of society. In 1679 Thomas Otway added a lengthy dialogue between the dying lovers in the tomb scene and in 1748 David Garrick added Juliet's funeral scene with stylized Capulet monologues for the daughter, who, ironically, so far just pretends to be dead.[178] In the contemporary theatre, some creators attempted to play with the overall perception of the drama as a monument of heterosexual love and experiment with the implications of a same sex couple being cast in the title parts. This can be approached in two different ways: either by transforming the gender of Romeo or Juliet, or having a single sex (all-male / all-female) cast.

Before concentrating on the implications of cross-gender cast productions, one should look into the cosmos of the play itself. Even though what is usually first associated with the iconic title is pure, powerful, adolescent love, the truth of the matter is, that the core of the play is rooted in its very opposite – hate. The two battling families must be reconciled by a loss as extreme as the death not only of the young couple, but essentially of the entire young generation (Tybalt, Mercutio, Paris), the only young survivor being Benvolio. In her book *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* Coppélia Kahn argues that the feud in the play is not to be interpreted "as agent of fate, but [...] as an extreme and peculiar expression of patriarchal society, which Shakespeare shows to be tragically self-destructive."[179] Tellingly, the reason behind these quarrels is never revealed. That only strengthens the feeling of pointlessness and vanity of an argument that possibly began so long ago that no one actually remembers who initiated it and why.

[178] Gillian Woods: *Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet - A Readers' Guides to Essential Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013) 20 - 25
[179] Coppélia Kahn: *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1981) 84.

The mutual expressions of hatred between the two families are magnified by the ever present homosocial code of honour. In spite of not being a part of the reason for the quarrel, the youths take pride in being a part of the conflict. For instance, when Tybalt recognizes Romeo at the Capulet's soirée, his immediate reaction is rather extreme:

> Fetch me my rapier, boy.—
> What, dares the slave
> Come hither, covered with an antic face,
> To fleer and scorn at our solemnity?
> Now, by the stock and honor of my kin,
> To strike him dead I hold it not a sin. (I, v, 54 - 59)

One may argue that Tybalt's need to protect the family honour is strengthened by the presence of the guests, among which are, most likely, the members of his entourage. The public humiliation is too much to bear. This pattern appears many times in the course of the play and contributes to both Tybalt and Mercutio's premature deaths.

The two gangs of young men seem to be relatively self-sufficient, enjoying the company of women as something that comes and goes, yet valuing the male companionship much more. For instance, when Romeo pines for his previous love interest, Rosalind, and tells Benvolio that he cannot be taught to forget her, Benvolio replies: "I'll pay that doctrine, or else die in debt" (I, i, 229), suggesting that male company will cure his broken heart. Mercutio even goes as far as calling Rosaline "that same pale hard-hearted wench" (II, iv, 4). The harshness of his words as well as the strength of friendship with Romeo led some directors (Baz Luhrman among others) to suggest that Mercutio may be gay or bisexual and in love with Romeo. His death then gets a possible extra dimension in which the patriarchal majority gets rid of the other.

Strong patriarchal systems are commonly homophobic. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick claims that "'obligatory heterosexuality' is built into male-dominated kinship systems"[180]. Nevertheless, in spite of fear of explicit homosexuality, patriarchal structures commonly display strong features of homoeroticism. The example of terminology and conventions of American football speak for themselves (brilliantly

[180] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick: *Between Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) 3.

analyzed in Alan Dundes' essay "Into the End Zone for a Touchdown"). Verona supports its patriarchal system in a similar manner, with very suggestive lines relating to swords filled double entendres alluding to penii, especially in the introductory scene with Sampson and Gregory, servants representing the two quarrelling houses, who utter lines like "Draw thy tool"(I, i, 28) or "My naked weapon is out" (I, i, 29). Eventually Romeo chooses to respect his love for Juliet over the homosocial bonds, avoiding the conflict with Tybalt, which results in Mercutio's death. In an act of rage and want of vengeance, realizing his previous failure to fulfil the expectations of the homosocial circle, Romeo then kills Tybalt and is banished, but his alliance is now with Juliet and his wish to be with her overpowers the need of male companionship. This cements the young couple as two castaways.

Ever since they renounced their family names, they disobeyed the rules of the society they lived in on various levels, primarily breaking the patriarchal authority. Giving her a surprising amount of agency, Shakespeare allows Juliet to first formulate this, saying: "Thou art thyself, though not a Montague" (II, ii, 39). Yet the patriarchal system is deeply enrooted within the society and there are not many means of support for the young couple. Their mothers are not particularly present and usually simply rearticulate the father's commands, possibly in a softer way. As Felicity Dunworth points out: "Maternal authority is always compromised in *Romeo and Juliet* [...] maternal authority is in fact always a version of patriarchal authority."[181] Yet apart from their biological parents, both Romeo and Juliet have what Coppélia Kahn calls surrogate parents – for Romeo it is Friar Lawrence, for Juliet it is the Nurse, but the two characters differ in their function, or more precisely in their allegiance and docility towards the patriarchal system:

> In Friar Lawrence, Romeo finds a surrogate father outside that system, and in fact he never appears onstage with his parents. Juliet, on the other hand, always appears within her father's household until the last scene in the tomb. [...] With regard to Juliet, the Nurse is the opposite of what the Friar is for Romeo — a

[181]Felicity Dunworth: *Mothers and Meaning on the Early Modern English Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) 134.

> surrogate mother within the patriarchal family, but one who is, finally, of little help in assisting Juliet in her passage from child to woman.[182]

The only alternative to the patriarchal system, that represents an obvious threat to the young love, is then personified in the character of Friar Lawrence. His philosophy is closely linked with nature and natural order, as he describes in his first monologue in act II scene iii: "The earth, that's nature's mother, is her tomb. / What is her burying, grave that is her womb." (II, iii, 9 – 10) In the speech he describes the complexity of natural order, in which a flowers can be both healing and poisonous, which can be seen as a metaphor of the main conflict of the play. Yet, in spite of honouring the natural order, Friar Lawrence commonly uses means that are rather unnatural to help the young couple's cause. One may argue that he needs to adapt his weapons to give Romeo and Juliet a chance of succeeding in the unnatural feud, but his ability to scheme and deceive renders him ambiguous at best. The offered alternative approach is thus rather inconsistent, just like its dysfunctional delivery which eventually contributes to the tragic ending.

The stated above rather complicates the play's finale. The young lovers, who were the only ones able to break the patriarchal rules, are dead and their fathers are establishing a new brotherhood: "O brother Montague, give me thy hand. / This is my daughter's jointure, for no more / Can I demand." (V, iii, 296 - 298). Albeit ending the violence, the homosocial and patriarchal order is restored through the fathers' acceptance of the marriage: "The old patriarchs shake hands over their children's corpses, so that the marriage serves to secure a social bond."[183] That is a key to Jonathan Goldberg's interpretation of the play's ending: "The idealization of the lovers, to be brief, serves an ideological function. The marriage of their corpses in the eternal monuments of 'pure gold' attempts to perform what marriage normally aims at in comedy: to provide the bedrock of social order. Or, to speak somewhat more exactly, the heterosexual order."[184]

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[182] Kahn: *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* 96.
[183] Woods 143.
[184] Jonathan Goldberg: *Queering the Renaissance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994) 219.

The sense of fighting against the distorted system in order to vindicate the natural love led many theatre-makers to look for parallels of such struggle in contemporary society. Some found it in interracial coupling, others made use of the "love that dare not speak its name", working with a same sex couple. If either Romeo or Juliet is cross-gender cast, the revolt against the fathers' short-sighted command is arguably amplified. In present day Euro-American culture the parents' will is no longer as powerful, but homophobia has not been entirely eradicated, however hard the system tries to do so. The key argument repeated frequently by the creators of these productions lies in not only in the social ostracization of the relationship, but also in the final suicide of the two protagonists. Contemplating suicide, or self-harm is statistically much more frequent in LGBT youths, as was reported by the 2001 Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey: "47 percent of LGB youth compared to 19 percent of heterosexual youth had seriously considered suicide in the past year; 31 percent compared to the 8 percent had attempted it"[185].

Also, as was already suggested, because of the strictly patriarchal cosmos of the play, homosexuality would be even more frowned upon by the society. The young couple thus does not transgress only the fathers' will, but the very foundation of a patriarchal society – heteronormativity. Forcing his will on Juliet, Capulet tells her "I'll give you to my friend; / And you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets" (III, v, 191 – 192), honouring his promise to Paris rather than accepting his daughter's conviction. The line may be read as another echo of contemporary LGBT experience, as "[t]he mistreatment LGBT students experience at home may result in homelessness, either by choice or by force. It has been estimated that as many as 40 percent of homeless young people on city streets are gay, lesbian, or bisexual."[186]

However, as will be discussed further in the thesis, the queer reading of *Romeo and Juliet* may be problematic because of its pushing of a certain agenda, however commendable, through a narrative that is universal, therefore altering and possibly even limiting the text to a certain extent. The creators therefore commonly have to use the

[185] Laura J. Gambone: "Youth, At-Risk," ed. James Thomas Sears: *Youth, Education, and Sexualities: An International Encyclopedia, Volume 2* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005) 910.
[186] ibid.

basic mythemes and sections of the text, yet adapt it heavily to fit the needs of the particular interpretation.

The case is very different when it is not only one of the leading couple that is cross-gender cast, but the entire cast is male-only, or female-only. As was already suggested in the introduction and when discussing the doubling of the Fool and Cordelia in the Globe Theatre, when the audience understand the cross-gender casting as a part of the production's discourse that arguably stems from the original Elizabethan all-male staging tradition, they can accept female characters portrayed by a male much more easily, and after the initial awkward laughter, read the cross-gender casting simply as a part of the langue of the production. That much is true for any single-sex production. *Romeo and Juliet* is then ideal to examine single-sex casting further because of its position within the literary canon as the greatest (heterosexual) love-story of all time. The implications of a single-sex cast will be analyzed in the following section on the example of Filip Nuckolls' 2012 production of *Romeo and Juliet* from Činoherní studio Ústí nad Labem.

The all-male and all-female productions differ in the respect of being faithful or subversive to the staging tradition, but regarding the perception of gender their effect is very similar. It was possibly best described by Mark Rylance, the then artistic director of the Globe theatre, who when discussing the theatre's new trend of all-female productions stated that "Shakespeare's original actors were not limited by the gender of the parts they played, but enjoyed a revolutionary theatre of the imagination where commoner played king, man played woman, and, within the plays, woman, man."[187] This obviously is not the goal of every single-sex production, but with a certain level of generalization one may assume that "selectively cross-cast productions tend to emphasize the gap between actress and character more consistently than all-female productions."[188] This statement can be even stronger when it comes to all-male productions as they commonly directly derive their raison d'être from the original

[187]Ian Burrell: "It's Richard III, as you've never seen her", *Independent.co.uk*, Independent News & Media, 31 May 2003 <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/news/its-richard-iii-as-youve-never-seen-her-106906.html> 1 Jul 2016.
[188] James C. Bulman: *Shakespeare Re-dressed: Cross-gender Casting in Contemporary Performance* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008) 183.

Shakespearean theatre practice and because of that they try to encourage "the audience to see the character, not the cross-gender performer."[189]

4.2. Overview of Cross-gendered Staging History

4.2.2. Queer readings

It is rather difficult to trace the first queer production of *Romeo and Juliet*, as a lot of them are heavily adapted[190], and they are frequently done by high-school, or theatre academy student groups, amateur and semi-professional theatres. This is significant regarding the validity of the reading. It is nothing particularly academic, analytical or staging-tradition based. It is simply a manifestation of the need to reflect the present day state of the society, in which love and sexual attraction has a variety of different forms, yet bullying for otherness is still very prominent and frequently hits young people harder then parents' disapprovals and prohibitions. If a text allows that to happen, it is brilliant, yet in case of *Romeo and Juliet* it feels like some of the great subtlety of the text has to be sacrificed in order to fit a reading with a particular agenda.

Even though such readings may seem tempting and are at least partly justifiable as was detailed above, they alter the core of the play quite dramatically. One must then ask what is the reason why the parents are against the union of the young couple – is it because of the feud, or because of the homophobia that is inherent in the society? As was discussed above there are certain parallels that make *Romeo and Juliet* suitable for a gay / lesbian reading, yet to do so effectively, the text should be adapted, or at least cut drastically and very intricately to support the plan sufficiently, as the topics that are connected to same-sex love are not present in the text explicitly enough to make it a central theme. That is also suggested by the needed modifications of the titles of these productions, such as *Romeo and Julian*, *Romeo & Juliet: Forbidden Love Comes to North Carolina*, *The Deliverance of Juliet and her Romeo*, *Juliet & Romeo*. The adaptations and resulting productions vary both in quality and in the extent of alterations, but are usually not limited to simple cross-gender casting, therefore do not

[189] Klett 140.

[190] The term adaptation is not to be understood only as a transmedial conversion here (even though that took place as well, like one of the first gay adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* on film *Private Romeo* (2011)), but as adaptations that keep the medium of theatre, yet change the textual basis extensively to fit a particular purpose, therefore even heavily abridged productions may fall into this category.

fit the topic of the thesis entirely, as it may go as far as taking a text hostage for an essentially political cause.

4.2.3. Single-sex productions

Examining of the original staging tradition of Shakespearean drama attracted directors for a long time. One of those who were emphatically interested in reviving the standards of the Elizabethan stage at the turn of the twentieth century was William Poel, whose "experiments, initially marginal, included all-male productions, Elizabethan dress, a stage without scenery, and fuller (though expurgated) texts"[191] Poel became the first to do a production in which he cast two teenage females into the leading parts in 1905, casting Esme Percy as Romeo and Dorothy Minto as Juliet.[192] But then these attempts have been perceived mostly as a novelty and were not repeated if not in a secluded all-male, or all-female environment, as was discussed in the introductory section. For instance, Joe Calarco's 1997 play *Shakespear's R&J* (which later inspired the film *Private Romeo*) deals with a group of four students of an all-male academy in the 1950s who discover the text of *Romeo and Juliet* and start acting out scenes of it, which open new questions for their own lives. The temporal setting into the 1950s is telling. One must consider that homosexuality was not decriminalized until the 1960s (in the UK 1967[193], in the US the process was much longer, depending on the different states), thus any possible homoerotic imagery was to be avoided.

It was not until the 1990s that these attempts to perform Shakespeare with a single-sex cast became more main-stream. As was already mentioned, in 1993 Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company opened with their all-female version of *Romeo and Juliet*. In 1997 Peter Hall's son Edward Hall, a director as well, founded Propeller Theatre Company, an all-male company specializing in Shakespeare.[194] This tendency was cemented by the opening of the Globe Theatre the same year, its first

[191] Lois Potter: *The Life of William Shakespeare: A Critical Biography* (Malden: Wiley – Blackwell Publishing, 2012) 429.
[192] William Hutchings: "'Oh, die Angst! Die Angst!' *Romeo and Juliet* as Rock Opera," ed. Kimball King: *Western Drama Through the Ages: Theater Movements and Issues, Vol 2*. (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Press, 2007) 468.
[193] Nicholas Bamforth: *Sexuality, Morals and Justice* (London: Cassell, 1997) 28.
[194] Power 69.

performance being an all-male *Henry V*.[195] In spite of a great tradition of both all-male and all-female performances, a single sex version of *Romeo and Juliet* was never performed in the Globe theatre. Nevertheless, the very existence of theatres specializing in single-sex performance strengthened the interest of other companies to experiment with it.[196] From the variety of productions of same-sex *Romeo and Juliet*, only three will be discussed based on their visibility, accessibility of documentation and mainly difference in approach.

In 2008 Shakespeare Theatre Company based in Washington DC attempted to approach an all-male production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Its director David Muse attempted to treat the question of gender in the production sensitively and judiciously. In an interview he stated that:

> Shakespeare was a writer of gorgeous poetry, but the reason the love poetry in this play is so glorious is in part because Shakespeare knew that two young men would be performing it. You couldn't just count on two actors looking at each other and realistically being in love in a way that the audience was going to buy. And so the actors need to jump into the language and make its power convince us of the power of this love.[197]

However understandable and commendable that is, critics described the result as lacking in chemistry between the lead couple. Also, as one theatregoer pointed out: "I expected even more than usual, given the press materials' quoting of director David Muse's hope that an all-male cast would give a 'fresh and dangerous and transgressive' approach to the production. But in this era, just doing an all-male cast is not going to give you transgressive. It isn't even innovative anymore".[198] The production opted for a rather traditional set and costume, whose purpose, as suggested by *The Washington Post's* Peter Marks, may be "to cloak the all-male artifice in as much credibility as

[195] "Henry V [1997]", *Shakespeares Globe.com*, <http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discovery-space/previous-productions/henry-v-2> 1 Jul 2016.
[196] most companies doing same-sex Shakespeare are listed in Terri Power's *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice*
[197] Akiva Fox, "An Interview with David Muse," *Asides* [Washington], vol. 1 2008/09: 9.
[198] Jenn Larsen: "We Love Arts: Romeo & Juliet", *WeLoveDC.com*, 23 Sep 2008 <http://www.welovedc.com/2008/09/23/we-love-arts-romeo-juliet/> 2 Jul 2016.

possible"[199]. The words above show, that what may be sufficient in the historically accurate building of the Globe does not usually work in other theatres. By the end of the noughties the novelty of the approach has vanished and the directors had to find more substance in the single-sex productions then historical accuracy.

In 2012 in the off-off Broadway environment of Chernuchin Theater the director Anya Saffir and the Tragedians of the City did an all-male production of the play with a different key motivation for such casting than the historical one. Her reading of the play was rooted in the simplistic hatred of the other: "To me there's something interesting about highlighting how fictitious this idea of the other is [...] by having everyone on stage actually being the same gender."[200] The director then reflected upon the fact, that in spite of keeping female gender of the female characters, the production was not trying to create a perfect illusion of their femininity, thus kept the audience subtly aware of the masculinity of the performers, which she found beneficial for the content of the play, as the couple's love is "so transgressive, it's deeply forbidden and thrillingly so and I think the more clear it is that this is subversive, the more the audience can feel the underdog nature of their love."[201] The production's visual was inspired by Roberto Rossellini's classic film *Rome, open city*, which was set during the Nazi occupation[202], avoiding the Renaissance visual. The reviews were rather positive, claiming that: "the stripped-down production offers a refreshing take on the text that feels both timely and classic"[203], "an all-male ensemble cast [...] allows this classic story to be seen anew"[204] and that even "Shakespeare's women [...] come vividly to life, adding an arresting

[199] Peter Marks: "In All-Male 'Romeo & Juliet,' A Coy Affair", *Washington Post.com*, The Washington Post Company, 17 Sept 2008 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/16/AR2008091603601.html> 2 Jul 2016.
[200] TragediansNYC's channel: "Romeo And Juliet - Promo 3 - Interview with Director Anya Saffir," 12 March 2012, Online video clip, Youtube, *Youtube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ifKLO6fA3w> 5 Jul 2016.
[201] ibid.
[202] Deirdre Donovan: "A CurtainUp Review Romeo and Juliet", *Curtain Up.com*, <http://www.curtainup.com/romeoandjulietmale12.html> 5 Jul 2016.
[203] Brandon Voss: "Seat Filler: NYC Theater Guide for March 2012", *Advocate.com*, Here Media, 21 March 2012 <http://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/theater/seat-filler/2012/03/21/seat-filler-march-2012> 5 Jul2016.
[204] BWW News Desk: "Tragedians of the City Open All Male Romeo and Juliet 2/29-3/17" *Broadway World.com*, 24 Jan 2012 <http://www.broadwayworld.com/off-off-broadway/article/Tragedians-of-the-City-Open-All-Male-ROMEO-AND-JULIET-229-317-20120124> 5 Jul 2016.

frisson to this surprisingly engrossing production"[205]. The reviews show that with a sufficient interpretative input, which bases the single-sex casting on specific motivation rather than historical accuracy, an all-male cast can provide a very intriguing gender-related performance, which becomes a part of the production's discourse all the same, yet is allowed to be dealt with in a fresher and more nuanced manner.

In 2012 another same-sex production of *Romeo and Juliet* took place. This time an all-female one by the Tallulah Theatre company in Britsol's Bierkeller Theatre. The company identifies as "[a] community theatre group for women who love women and identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning"[206], therefore their production did attempt to make LGBT issues its main theme. The production's motto was "Shakespeare's timeless tale of ill-fated love is given a fresh twist…it's a girls world - it's a gay world!"[207] The set and the costumes were present-day, as well as the music with the likes of Rihanna, or Katy Perry, reflecting the group's claim that they "love turning the world on its head and giving platform to timeless classics that suddenly excite as they have a new statement about the modern relationship and modern values"[208].

The rather unknown local group was chosen for the purpose of the thesis as a proof that heavily gendered readings are not US-theatre-specific (even though majority of them do appear in the USA). The production was received with a mixture of appreciating the intent and pointing out the deficiencies in the realization. One theatregoer remarked that "Aside from referring to Romeo in the feminine form, the fact that he was played by a she was insignificant in the storyline, making the change seem more like the company could not find a male actor to be Romeo, so just brought in a girl instead."[209] This is by no means to be shaming of local theatre practices, but the

[205] Ron Cohen: "NY Review: 'Romeo and Juliet'", *Backstage.com*, Backstage, 6 March 2012 <http://www.backstage.com/review/ny-theater/off-off-broadway/ny-review-romeo-and-juliet/> 6 Jul 2016.
[206] "Arts and Culture", *LGBTbristol.org.uk*, <http://bristoltheatrereview.com/r/TydO4ubETSOPgj2-XDx6yg> 6 Jul 2016.
[207] "All women - Romeo and Juliet", *Missing Lesbians.co.uk*, 28 Apr 2012 <http://www.missinglesbians.co.uk/2012_04_01_archive.html> 6 Jul 2016.
[208] ibid.
[209] "Romeo and Juliet", *Bristol Theatre Review.com*, 15 Feb 2012 <http://bristoltheatrereview.com/r/TydO4ubETSOPgj2-XDx6yg> 6 Jul 2016.

example shows perfectly what happens if the gender-political intent overrules the theatrical functionality. Gender reversal is not self-sufficient. It has to be acknowledged and developed throughout the rehearsal process and most importantly, even in a single-sex cast has to be motivated. The company advertised that their aim was to "give lesbian and transgender women the opportunity to explore classic and modern texts that have been originally written to tell a heterosexual tale"[210], yet that is not enough of a concept to build a production around.

The selected performances should indicate how intricate can operating even in a seemingly safer environment of same-sex casting be. A historical approach is possible, yet very risky. If the performance is to be perceived simply as a historical study of Elizabethan theatre, it has been done already and to be interesting for new and new audiences probably needs to be done in a historically matching arena, such as the Globe theatre, offering an overall experience that strives to approximate that of the Elizabethan audience. If it is to be rooted in the principles of Elizabethan theatre, but make a contemporary and relevant theatre out of them, the performance needs to take just the method in all its purity and ideally forget about historically accurate costumes etc., as to the Elizabethan spectators they were present-day. This approach will hopefully be shown when analyzing the Czech all-male production by Filip Nuckholls.

The opposite extreme was described when discussing the third example - a highly politically charged performance, which pushed a lesbian agenda via one of the greatest texts of the world's literary canon. The problem, among others, with this production was the insufficiency of such approach as Shakespeare's text are wonderfully multi-layered and using them to deliver such a particular message will always restrict the text a great deal. That problem will be sooner or later be uncovered by the creators as well and most likely will result in a confused production, where the cross-gender casting may end up looking accidental, as one of the audience members remarked. The only way to approach Shakespeare is with an open mind, which rejects not only gender binarism, but any other means of pigeon-holing, as the texts carry a

[210] "All women - Romeo and Juliet", *MissingLesbians.co.uk*, 28 Apr 2012 <http://www.missinglesbians.co.uk/2012_04_01_archive.html> 6 Jul 2016.

universally human message, which is why Shakespeare remains the most staged author of all times.

4.3. Cross-gendered *Romeo and Juliet* on Czech Stages

There are not any recorded productions of a same-sex couple performing the leading parts in *Romeo and Juliet* on Czech stages. The only production that can be mentioned is the recent adaptation of the play by Divadlo koňa a motora, which is a travelling open-air theatre company who specializes in radical adaptations of Shakespeare.[211] Other cross-gendered performances in the Czech productions of *Romeo and Juliet* are limited to a single part, other than the main couple, such as Jan Frič's casting of Vladimír Marek as the Nurse in his 2012 production of the play in Divadlo NaHraně.[212] The fact that the strong trend of queer adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* especially on minor and semi-professional stages that has been very prominent in the Anglophone sphere in the last decade has not reached Czech Republic (yet) can be also seen as a proof of the Czech reluctance to experiment with gender on stage, which causes at least a delay. This happened for instance to in-yer-face theatre (or coolness drama), which culminated on Czech stages in the mid-noughties, when in the UK the trend was already over.

In spite of building a Czech version of the Globe Theatre in 1999 and opening it with a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, the theatre did not host a same-sex production of any play by William Shakespeare until Vladimír Morávek's *Richard III*. Czech audiences thus had to wait to experience an all-male version of *Romeo and Juliet* till 2012, when the already mentioned production of Činoherní studio took place.

4.4. *Romeo and Juliet* of Činoherní studio in Ústí nad Labem (2012)

When asked what is Elizabethan (staging) convention, the production's director Filip Nuckolls replied, that

[211] "Divadlo koňa a motora: Romeo a Julie", *DivadloX10.cz*, <http://www.divadlox10.cz/9-repertoar/569-divadlo-kona-a-motora-romeo-a-julie> 6 Jul 2016.
[212] Olga Koníčková: "Romeo a Julie … a co jako? aneb To světu svítá a stmívá se v nás", *Kultura21.cz*, 9 Oct 2012 <http://www.kultura21.cz/divadlo/5252-romeo-a-julie-a-co-jako> 7 Jul 2016.

> "the basic element of its illusion is spoken word. [...] From the perspective of staging 'the convention of Elizabethan theatre' works with the stage as a podium which does not have to carry a particular set design, precisely because everything is spoken[...]. It does not count costume as an aesthetic component, but only means of characterization, which [...] leads us not only to the substitution of female characters for men, but also old for young, thin for fat etc. It is a convention that let fantasy out into the space between the actor and the audience. That it where its power comes from, not, as many mistakenly suppose, the travesty."[213]

Uncovering the basis of the all-male casts of the Elizabethan theatre and its benefits is clearly visible on Nuckolls' production of *Romeo and Juliet*. The set design has two levels, inspired by Elizabethan upper stage and the lighting is supported by approximately sixty candles. The costumes are timeless – the male protagonists wear white shirts, black ties and trousers, those performing female parts have long black skirts and bare top half of the body, disabling any forceful visual illusions of femininity.

The production is quite vigorously abridged, lasting about an hour and a half, resulting in a rather dynamic and energetic whole. The entrance of the female heroines on stage is delayed by cutting the lines of Lady Capulet and Lady Montague in act I scene i and deleting Juliet's interaction with her mother and the Nurse in act I scene iii. The first time the female characters are thus present on stage is at the Capulet's soirée. The Nurse is portrayed within the Shakespearean tradition of being played by larger comic actor, getting laughs whenever the character appears on stage. In her case the audience seems to be much more aware that she is portrayed by a male actor then in case of Juliet, confirming the comedy potential of male-to-female cross-gender casting, but showing that in a single production this value can vary and is a matter of approaching the character and the performing its gender.

The production avoids kitsch that is so frequently associated with *Romeo and Juliet*. There is an admirable vigorousness in the fight of the all-male ensemble in a

[213] Radek Strnad: "Při zkoušení Romea a Julie jsme zjistili, že nás Shakespeare hrozně baví", *Denik.cz*, Vltava Labe Media a.s., 30 Aug 2013 <http://www.denik.cz/divadlo/romeo-padne-taktez-julie-i-dalsi-to-zabije-20130829-cis7.html> 7 Jul 2016.

setting that is anything but descriptive to deliver a meaningful performance. The iconic balcony scene even provides room for laughter at the abrupt precipitousness of young love. The omission of pathos as well as slight distancing due to the presence of cross-gender cast Juliet and lack of opulent set design, or props, intriguingly, brings the text closer to the audience, makes it more relevant, accessible and understandable.

The homosocial banter of the young Montagues is brilliantly depicted in act II scene iv, beginning with hangover Mercutio and Benvolio's entrée with a jar of pickles and culminating in the rhetoric battle between Romeo and Mercutio, which is judged by Benvolio as if it was a tennis match. Here the skill of the young actors truly shines. When the Nurse enters the scene, the gender dynamics become interesting. The language that the wild boys use with the lady, calling her "ancient" etc., is something that the audience could find offensive, which would significantly reduce their sympathy towards the group, yet as the audience is aware of the fact that the performer is male and his function is comedic, they tend to laugh with the young fellows rather than scorn their indecency.

The overall light-hearted atmosphere of the first half of the production thickens dramatically with Mercutio's death. There is no laughter when the Nurse arrives to tell Juliet of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment in spite of the fact that she curses the fickle nature of the males, who cannot be trusted not to do something stupid: "No faith, no honesty in men, all perjured, / All forsworn, all naught, all dissemblers." (III, ii, 86 – 87) Unlike the first half which is dominated by the powerful performance of Jan Plouhar in the part of Romeo, the star of the second half is Vojtěch Kadeřábek's Juliet. Albeit not a professional actor, thus having some difficulties with stage speech and tempo, his performance is well-built, especially when it comes to gender performance, even if lacking in technique. The obedience and necessary equivocations that the character must go through as a female are all the more evident when portrayed by a male performer, being in sharp contrast with the straightforward hotshot experience of the males in the play. Being wooed by the tactile Paris makes Juliet feel obviously uneasy, yet she is not able to demonstrate her unwillingness to participate by anything but stepping aside. Her father's harsh words and even harsher tone are met with nothing but respectful replies that are the only means of self-preservation.

The gore ending of the drama is all the more powerful on an empty stage with the dim light of the candles only gently supported by spotlights. The tempo is quite fast, keeping even the most iconic double suicide scene unsentimental. The production is successful in presentation of its same-sex discourse, making sure that the audience reads the love-affair as a heterosexual one. In the tomb scene in particular, Kadeřábek's acting abilities begin to be slightly insufficient, yet it does not seem to matter as imagination is such a great part of the spectatorship, that the audience is willing to add their own emotions to the somewhat vague performance. In a way that also supports the "depathetization" of the play.

The critics viewed the performance generally favourably, praising the leading couple's "ideal mixture of being believable, vigorous, unpretentious and delicate"[214]. The production that was first intended as a Christmas gift for the fans and was to be played only a few times ended up in the repertory of the theatre until 2015 and even had the sad task of being the last performance played in the space of Činoherní studio before the infamous departure of the ensemble from the premises because of difficulties when acquiring subsidy.[215] The performance was then played in many theatres across the Czech Republic including various open-air stages.

[214] Petr Klár: "Muži sobě aneb Romeo a Julie", *Divadelni-noviny.cz*, Společnost pro Divadelní noviny, 24 Jan 2013 <http://www.divadelni-noviny.cz/cinoherni-studio-usti-nad-labem-romeo-a-julie-recenze> 8 Jul 2016

[215] Marie Třešňáková: "Dnes naposled! – oznamuje ústecké Činoherní studio", *CeskaTelevize,cz*, Česká televise, 31 Jan 2014 <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/kultura/1050429-dnes-naposled-oznamuje-ustecke-cinoherni-studio> 8 Jul 2016

5. CONCLUSION

The lines above hopefully proved the variety of possible uses of cross-gender casting. In *Hamlet* the casting of an actress for the main part highlights some distinctive features of the young prince's character, that force him to put on a masculine show - prominently perform his masculinity. In *King Lear* there are two possibilities of cross-gender casting. The first one, casting Lear by a woman, goes against the type and forces one to reconsider the character in an unexpected way. The second one – doubling of the Fool and Cordelia is a perfect example of a cross-gendered performance that can be realized with little gender implications, as the core of the link between the two characters is at least partially not based on gender, but on their similar goals and their perception of truth and honesty, which is enriched by the familial bond with Lear. In *Romeo and Juliet* the thesis attempted to show that even though changing the presupposed heterosexuality for homosexuality may add an extra level of contemporary relevance to a more than four hundred years old play, it frequently results in an adaptation to a smaller or greater extent, as includes pushing forward a rather specific topic which is not explicitly a part of the original text in any other way but the grand, yet disruptive nature of the relationship. A specific question altogether, yet in the thesis joined to the chapter concerned with *Romeo and Juliet* for structural purposes, is single-sex casting, that very often strives to make the audience oblivious to the gender of the performers as male or female only dictum becomes a part of the discourse of the production, that is based on the Elizabethan staging history.

By that means, one may argue, the all-male and all-female performances come closest to what is called gender-blind casting. The term itself, as was already suggested in the introductory section, is a paradox. A director can never disregard the gender of a performer when working on a production, simply because it is there, it exists and the audience will be able to recognize it. When there is a green apple in the corner of a black-box stage that is never used or explained in the production, the audience will not only notice, but interpret it, look for reasons for it to be there.[216] That is analogous with a performer's gender. If a director chooses to have a female performer play an originally

[216] More details regarding the theory of perception can be found for instance in Otakar Zich's *The Aesthetics of the Art of Drama*, or Jan Císař's *Člověk v situaci*.

male part, he does have to consider it when working on the performance. He may feel that gender is not the reason why he chose to cast the said person in that role, but it is a part of "the package", it makes the performer who he is and therefore is a part of the reason why he or she was cast in the first place, albeit maybe not the most important one. But gender-blind casting cannot really go further than that.

Why is it then so problematic for theatre-makers, who are for sure aware of this, to discuss cross-gender casting's implications to their full extent? When commenting on her choice to cast Kathryn Hunter as Lear Helena Kaut-Howson stated that it had "nothing to do with feminism at all. If I hadn't known an actress like Kathryn Hunter ... I would never have thought of casting a woman in that part"[217]. The quote suggests a possible explanation of why are the creators more likely to diminish the effect that a cross-gender casting may have, even though it is obvious, that the audience will not find it irrelevant whether a part is portrayed by a male or a female performer. There is an understandably undesirable brand of being an explicitly feminist production, which of course would be a great simplification of the matter, which would politicize the project and therefore disqualify it at least for a part of the possible audience. This points to a problem that seems to be relevant to a lot of the reflections of the productions, mainly by their creators, but commonly even by the critics, which is the opinion that if a cross-cast production does not use gender as a key topic (and frequently even if it does, but does not openly acknowledge it), then the production is gender-blind and the cross-gender casting does not matter. That view is nevertheless rather limiting, as cross-gendered productions do not necessarily open only gender-related topics.

There is also a practical benefit of cross-gender casting, as it makes important parts available to new performers, especially when it comes to women. The older an actress gets the lower is the amount of interesting parts there are for her to play. Cross-gendered and all-female productions in particular often mention the inequality of job offers in the industry as one of the reasons for working this way. Nevertheless, cross-gender casting is, in spite of its long stage tradition, still commonly perceived as novelty and frequently as an attempt to politicize classical plays (which is at times true). A very

[217] Klett 57.

recent survey by YouGov asked 2000 people about actors of different race and gender performing some of the most iconic parts such as Hamlet, James Bond or Robin Hood: "When asked about a female Hamlet, 48% did not like the idea. This contrasts with only 15% who were in favour, and 28% who were 'neutral'."[218]

The reluctance to accept cross-gender casting can be seen on Czech stages as well, even more than in the Anglophone sphere. The numbers of cross-gender cast parts in the Czech realm is noticeably low, nearly non-existent before the Velvet Revolution and there is still a noticeable delay when re-considering gender on stage, yet the trend is slowly reaching Czech theatres as well. A great pioneer in a major cross-gendered performance of a Shakespearean part is Pavlína Štorková's recent success as Richard III in David Drábek's production of the play form Hradec Králové. Nonetheless the trend is far from mainstream.

It is obvious that cross-gendered productions need a lot of careful interpretation, valid motivation and intricate performance, but if done aptly it can bring a new perspective to notorious works. Cross-gender performances may seem threatening because they challenge what is perceived as most stable: gender, sex, masculinity and femininity, yet isn't that a part of the twentieth and twenty-first century experience, when the perspective regarding these categories has evolved so dramatically? Also, strict realism is no longer a dictum on stages and room for the audience's imagination and further interpretation is not only allowed, but desired. But destabilizing gender is obviously attacking something so basic, that it is not generally acceptable. Judith Butler among others has opened new ways of considering gender, but they are by far not inherent in the human way of thinking, quite the opposite, and the general instinct is to disprove anything that tends to break the illusion of sex and gender as firmly given and unalterable. Nevertheless, the perception of gender and sexuality is slowly loosening and that is at least a part of the reason why are cross-gendered performances rising in both numbers and popularity. Cross-gender casting is therefore to be advocated not only as means of approaching a text in a different way, but also as a way to re-examine one's

[218] David Hutchison: "Half of Brits don't want female Hamlets, claims research", *The Stage.co.uk*, The Stage Media Company Ltd, 6 April 2016 < https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/2016/half-of-brits-dont-want-female-hamlets-claims-research/ > 9 Jul 2016.

way of thinking and if that is not a desirable effect in a piece of theatre, then it is difficult to say what is.

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